As the net closed about him, was there no one to believe in Martin's innocence?

A DREAM OF TREASON

by Maurice Edelman

"May he dream treason and wake to find it true . . ." These lines from John Donne's *The Curse* describe the theme of Maurice Edelman's new and thrilling novel about a Foreign Office official on the fringe of middle-age who, entrusted with a critical task, finds that, in fulfilling it, he has entered a twilight world where guilt and innocence are confounded and dream and reality mingled.

The diplomatic setting of Edelman's novel is contemporary; its background is as familiar as the Parliamentary scene which he so vividly and convincingly described in *Who Goes Home.* But, as in his previous books, he brings to *A Dream of Treason* his rare capacity for interpreting the drama of modern life in unique and memorable situations. The terrible dilemma which Martin Lambert's duty imposes on him is one which may well become classic in modern literature, so close is it, symbolically at any rate, to the potential experience of us all.

Interwoven with this story of public affairs is the deeply moving account of Lambert's personal dilemma when, in the love of an eighteen-year-old girl, he sees the prospect of a brief shelter and escape from a marriage that has been a burden and a career on the point of foundering.

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A DREAM OF TREASON

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A DREAM OF TREASON

By MAURICE EDELMAN

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To JOHN

6021902

A DREAM OF TREASON

May he dream treason, and believe that he
Meant to perform it, and confess, and die,
And no record tell why . . .

The Curse—JOHN DONNE

I

"AND YOUR WIFE?"

"She's ill."

"Yes," said the Foreign Secretary. "I'm sorry—very sorry. I like Eleanore greatly."

Across the wide, mahogany table, Lambert watched the hands of the Foreign Secretary signing the name, Andrew Brangwyn—thick "A" and "B," the rest a wave—in the folio of letters. When he had blotted the last page, Brangwyn pushed his papers away, walked to the high windows, and stared across The Horse Guards Parade to the rim of yellow lights that defined St. James's Park through the rising fog.

"If it gets any worse," he said, talking towards the darkness, "I'll send for linkmen. It took me twenty minutes to get to the House last night. What's the time?"

Martin Lambert took his watch from his pocket and said, "Half past seven, sir."

"The official time," said Sir James Padley, the Permanent Under-Secretary, looking at the slow pendulum of the nineteenth century wall clock, "is twenty-seven minutes past seven."

"Of the two," Brangwyn said, returning to his chair behind the table, "I prefer half past seven. Your interpretation, James, is too meticulous. That's the trouble with the

products of red-brick universities."

"Birmingham, sir . . ." Padley began.

"New, James, too new. You treat all knowledge as if it began with your own discovery of it. You've no sense of history. Many facts—no understanding. No tradition. Your thought has no ancestry."

Sir James Padley smiled comfortably in his arm-chair. He was familiar with the Foreign Secretary's banter; he knew that he meant every word of it.

"We new men, sir," he answered, "have to improvise as we go along. We're pragmatists—we take things as they are, and make them what we want them to be. To paraphrase Vigny, we arrange for our ancestors to descend from ourselves. . . ."

"You see, Martin, what I have to endure," said Brangwyn, turning to Lambert. "Fifty years ago, the Head of the Department would have quoted me a Greek epigram. With the spread of popular education—and a revised syllabus—he now refers to a third-rate French poet who disliked military service. There's no doubt about it, Britain's been ruined by her Education Acts. . . . Are you losing face in front of a subordinate, James?"

"No, not a bit," said Padley. "At the Foreign Office we make a most careful study of our relative importance. And our conclusions are fixed."

Lambert laughed uncertainly. Brangwyn hadn't yet asked him to take a seat. Nor did he know the reason why Padley had telephoned him to his flat that morning, abruptly and privately, asking him to call on the Minister at a quarter past seven.

He had arrived to find the secretary's room already empty. Entering with caution, he had tapped at the inner door, and Sir James Padley himself had opened it.

"Good-evening, Martin," Brangwyn said. "How are you?" and went on writing while Padley read a typescript, and Lambert himself, studying the ponderous painting of George III behind the Foreign Secretary's head, waited, uneasy and ignorant of the reason for the summons.

"I have no sympathy with what passes nowadays for culture," Brangwyn continued. "In fact, I can't understand, James, why you spend so much time at Festivals."

He leaned back in order to get more air. A thin haze had filtered in from outside during the day, and lay gauzily between him and Padley. The Foreign Secretary coughed a little; although he had rowed for Cambridge, his years in the City had fattened his chest and made him bronchitic.

"I never go to Festivals," he said. "Beastly things! Too mournful! Everyone you see there is the victim of a self-inflicted enthusiasm. They all go determined to be exalted, even if it kills them. Drama, concerts, ballet—do sit down, Martin—pictures; three days of it and they're already suffering from Festival-fatigue. Oh, the sad pleasures! On they go, evening after evening, acres of nodding grey heads . . ."

"I hope to go to Aix next year," Sir James Padley said, undisturbed.

". . . brooding on the next day's gaiety," Brangwyn went on. "If only I had the courage to defy you, James, I'd ask the Chancellor to cut every one of the Festival grants. . . . Where were you this year, Martin?"

"At Cavalaire—a little place in the south of France . . ."

"I know, I know. Infested with campers . . ."

"I think, sir, that's Cavalière. . . ."

"Cavalaire," said Brangwyn, "represents for me, in a sense, the decline of the French. They camp in rows—with running water and laundries laid on. And squat, black-

haired men with bulging calves and sandals—they all look like waiters on holiday. The great heresy of British diplomacy in this century has been our faith in the Anglo-French alliance. Its strength is a myth. It's never helped us. We've allowed ourselves to be misled into arrangements—well, never mind. How is Eleanore, Martin?"

"She's ill, sir. I told you."

"Ah, yes—ill. That's the third time she's been ill in the last five years."

"Yes," said Lambert. He felt that he was beginning to understand why the Foreign Secretary had sent for him, and he raised himself from the disadvantageous softness of the leather chair.

"It's a pity," said Brangwyn, wriggling his chin where his stiff white collar was cutting it. "A pity. In a year or two, we might have made you Minister at Lisbon—or somewhere. . . ."

"I don't understand, sir," said Martin.

"It's very simple," said the Foreign Secretary with a sudden asperity. "You've been Deputy Head of the News Department for three years. With your experience and qualifications you should have been promoted long ago. You haven't been. Do you understand why?"

"It isn't a question for me to answer. I'm satisfied to do my job."

"But you're handicapped . . ."

Lambert looked at Brangwyn's expression that had become milder.

"Yes, handicapped. Your wife's illness . . ."

"That, sir, is a misfortune—a personal one. It has never interfered with my duties. . . ."

"It has," Brangwyn said, and paused, waiting for a comment from Lambert. Sir James Padley crossed his legs, and turned the typescript face-downwards.

"Eleanore is now in a nursing home near Toulon. . . ."

"Yes. . . ."

"Her ailment is a simple one. She drinks too much."

Lambert pushed his chair away, and began to rise, but the Foreign Secretary waved him down.

"No, Martin, you mustn't be wounded. . . . I want you to understand that the delay in giving you a suitable post has nothing to do with any disability in yourself. You're all right."

Lambert waited for Brangwyn to continue.

"Your wife, you see, has given us a lot of trouble. At Nice —at the reception given by the Mayor to the Inter-Parliamentary Union . . ."

"With Ganüplü?"

"Yes."

"She called him a Turk."

"Yes."

"But he is a Turk."

"Exactly," said Brangwyn. "He didn't have to be reminded of it—nor with the embellishments that Eleanore added. . . ."

"I was there," said Lambert. "Eleanore was strained and tired, and Ganüplü was offensive—you know how they sometimes become. . . ."

"And in Paris last year at the cocktail party for General Melton's staff . . . Carlton Gardens three months ago—when the Italian Prefects came on their goodwill tour . . . You know, you can't always blame the other fellow, Martin. There's a pattern in Eleanore's behaviour that you can't get away from."

"The pattern. . . ." Lambert began, and stopped.

They had arrived at the Faubourg St. Honoré for the party, given by the Ambassador for General Melton and

his staff officers who had taken up their appointments at Versailles.

"If you see me drink more than two," Eleanore had said to him as they walked up the wide steps, "I give you permission to come up—nicely, of course—and take it quietly from my hand. You will do it nicely, won't you, Martin?"

For the first half-hour, as the room gradually filled with guests, French civil servants and Parliamentarians, officers from SHAPE, and the Embassy staff, Lambert, when he could look away from the Senator who was explaining to him how the Rhône barrage would profit French industry, caught occasional glimpses, in the gilt rococo looking-glasses that lined the walls, of Eleanore, surrounded by a courteous group of American officers, multiplied a dozen times in her black suit with its chinchilla edging. Through the assembly of heads, he smiled to her, and she waved back to him, raising one finger and pursing her mouth to say "one." Contented, Lambert went with Mathers, the press attaché, into a quieter adjoining room, where for a few minutes he read a lengthy handout which the Embassy was issuing to the newspapers that evening.

"What do you think of it, Martin?" Mathers asked.

"Excellent," said Lambert. "The only thing it leaves out is what the French want to know. All that interests them is how many divisions we're ready to keep on the Continent. . . ."

Mathers shrugged his shoulders. "We're selling a carcase and calling it a horse. As long as the Foreign Secretary—"

A crash of laughter came from the next room, and Lambert said, "Let's go back. The party's improving."

They had difficulty in urging their way through the crowd that had now increased till the only gaps lay between incongruent bodies, buffered by hands holding glasses, or separated for a second by the furrow of a sweating waiter calling,

"Please, sir . . . please, madam."

At first, Lambert couldn't see Eleanore. He could only hear her laugh, a sudden shriek, above the waterfall-din of conversation. She had moved from where he had last seen her, but, in a corner near the window, he could see some of the junior American officers, who had come from SHAPE, surrounding a settee with arms linked over their shoulders as if in a football scrum.

"Martin!"

Anderson-Smith, the First Secretary, had edged his way up to him.

"Martin, I think Eleanore's not feeling very well. H.E. thought you might want to take her home."

Lambert heard his wife's voice from the settee.

"Oh—no!" she said in delight, prolonging the vowel. "No—o!"

The officers laughed loudly and Lambert thrust a path for himself to where his wife was sitting, with a low table in front of her and four empty glasses.

"Hello, Martin," she said, her eyes bright and their pupils small. "This is my husband."

The three officers greeted him.

"I told you I had a husband," Eleanore repeated. "This is my husband. This is Van and this is Richard and this is Van. Two Vans!" She gave a little laugh into her glass.

"That's right," said the Captain. "Well, if you'll excuse me, sir." He shook hands with Lambert. "Glad to have met you." The other officer whom Eleanore had called Richard bowed and left with him.

"And this poor boy—waiter! That damned waiter—he won't look—this poor boy," said Eleanore, pointing to the third officer, "is only twenty-seven—twenty-seven—and he's got a wife and two children in Toledo, Ohio. Show my husband the photographs, Van. He loves photographs. He

loves children. You do love children, don't you, Martin?"

Her voice had risen, and her face was mottled.

"Waiter!" she said in an emphatic voice, standing and pushing away the table with her shins.

"Eleanore!" Lambert said.

"I want a drink," she said, jostling a French officer who politely withdrew from between her and the waiter. Eleanore stretched out her hand and took a gin and vermouth from the rattling tray that the waiter tried to withdraw.

"That's better," she said, sitting again on the settee. "Martin, you mustn't let waiters be—impertinent to your wife."

She took another gulp from her glass, her fingers wet and shiny with the alcohol that had slopped over.

"Van wouldn't allow it. Would you, Van?"

"The lady wasn't to have any," the thin, elderly waiter said in Lambert's ear. "Madame said she wasn't to have any more."

"Eleanore!" Lambert said. "I think we'd better go."

"Why are you always in such a beastly hurry?" she asked. "You're always in a hurry when I'm enjoying myself. . . ."

"I think I'd better be getting along," said Van.

"Not yet," said Eleanore. "Poor Van—only twenty-seven —and all alone in Europe—his wife . . ."

"I'll say good-bye, ma'am. Good-bye, sir," he said to Lambert. Lambert obliged himself to smile.

"You see what you've done," Eleanore said. "He's gone. . . . I'm going to have a drink."

"No," said Lambert in an undertone. "You're coming home. You've drunk too much already." He took her wrist.

"Leave me alone," she said loudly.

"Please be quiet," Lambert said, still in the same undertone. "I don't want . . ."

"You can't bully me," she said, getting to her feet. "I'm

going to get another drink."

Those nearest to them had carefully turned their backs to the conversation, leaving Lambert and his wife in an isolated hemisphere near the settee.

"You're coming home," Lambert repeated quietly.

"Leave me alone," she screamed. "You—you bastard!"

There was a sudden silence in the room, as if a talking film had broken and become congealed in a still. Then, in a moment, Anderson-Smith and the Ambassador's Private Secretary had hurried forward and said, "Eleanore, we wanted your advice on the new decorations in Chancery," and had taken her by the arm and, talking rapidly, led her away towards the cold, deserted offices. Lambert left immediately behind them, and the conversation, momentarily subdued, rose again.

"She's resting," Anderson-Smith said when he returned to the entrance-hall where Lambert was waiting. "She'll be all right in an hour or so. I'll get my wife to bring her home."

"No, thanks," said Lambert. "I'm very grateful to you, John. I'll take her home myself."

Anderson-Smith turned to go. "I'm terribly sorry, Martin. It's an awful nuisance—I won't pretend it isn't. . . . Gets people differently. I think you might send a note to H.E.—explain you had to leave early because Eleanore was ill."

"Thank you," said Lambert. "I know the formula."

He took his coat from the butler and walked out into the sudden chill of the courtyard, where, watching the high, lighted windows from an archway, he waited for the party to end.

And later, at the George V, when they lay in their beds, she said to him, "Martin—darling—please forgive me."

He looked across at her face, blotched and swollen from

tears, and she began to cry again with desperate stumbling sobs.

"Don't cry," he said. "It's no use. . . . It's . . ."

"Oh, darling," she wept. "I'm so unhappy—so unhappy. I want to die. All I want in life is to give you happiness, and it ends like this. . . ."

"Not always . . ."

"Yes—always, always, always."

He sat at her bedside, and drew the pale hair from her forehead.

"It's—it's that awful thing—it's always with me—I can't ever forget about it. I try to and want to—but I can't. Oh, I can't. . . ."

Her weeping had become a wail, and she clung to him with her mouth pressed into his neck. He stroked her hair and said, "It's over now. It's over. . . . It's years ago. No one was to blame."

The familiar reassurance.

"But I'm so frightened," she said, her sobs quietening. "I'm so frightened to go to sleep. I have such terrible dreams."

"You'll sleep well tonight. . . . But if you hadn't drunk so much . . ."

"Drunk so much!" she said, drawing away from him. "Drunk so much! What do you care about my misery?"

"I care very much—very much indeed."

She was lying on her back, with her face turned towards the ceiling, and had begun to cry again in a forlorn, hopeless lament that contorted her features.

"Eleanore!" he said gently. "Don't cry, darling. Please don't cry."

He looked at the white door with its golden traceries that divided their room from their neighbours'. "Don't cry. They'll hear you."

"That's all you care about," she said, pausing in the middle of her wailing. "All you care about is what they'll say. You never give a damn for me—never, never, never!"

Her sobs, resuming, grew louder and she began to strike her pillow with the sodden handkerchief in her fist.

Lambert walked to the curtains and, sitting on a chair by the window, propped his chin on his hand. At last, in exasperation, he shouted, "Stop crying. . . . Oh God—I've had enough of it. . . ."

He began to dress in the darkness. The sound of his wife's weeping ceased.

"Martin!" she said.

He didn't answer.

"Martin!" she repeated.

He still didn't answer, and continued to dress.

She switched the light on and looked at him.

"Martin," she said slowly, "if you leave me now, I'll kill myself."

His hands that had begun to knot his tie dropped to his sides.

"I'll kill myself," she repeated. "I swear it. . . . Go on, you can go."

He returned to the bedside and said, "Eleanore, why do you torment yourself like this—why do you torment us both?"

She had averted her face, and her nightdress had fallen from her shoulders in a black crenellation.

"I'm repulsive to you," she said. "I know I am. Don't pretend I'm not. . . ."

He put his hand under her warm armpit, and drew her towards him in silence.

"I am, I am," she kept on repeating, groping for his mouth with hers, her eyes shut. He felt the drool of her saliva on the corner of his mouth.

"You hate me," she kept repeating. "I'm repulsive to you."

"No," he said. "No, Eleanore. I don't hate you."

Afterwards, watching her asleep, he began to compose a letter to the Ambassador. She slept with a slight frown on her face, stirring from time to time in a whimper as if she were listening to the sullen approach of her dreams.

But that was three months ago, before their summer holiday. No one had mentioned it again. The Ambassador had been particularly amiable to Eleanore at the Constable Exhibition at the Orangerie when they stopped on their way to the South of France. What happened later had been private. The Abri and the drive over the mountain roads. And everything beginning again.

And now in the Foreign Secretary's room, Lambert, who had begun an angry reply, saw his own memory of Eleanore in France not buried in the discretion of his colleagues but reflected, vivid and malicious, in Brangwyn's eyes. He stopped, lowered his head and waited on guard for the Foreign Secretary to continue.

"I was thinking," said Brangwyn after a pause, "that your talents are wasted in the News Department."

"Do you mean—you want me to resign?" Lambert asked.

Brangwyn rose from his chair, walked around the table and put his arm on Lambert's shoulder. Lambert didn't look up.

"Resign?" Brangwyn said. "Resign? My dear fellow, can't you see I'm trying to help you?"

"Why have you asked me here tonight, sir?" Lambert asked, standing, and disengaging himself from the Foreign Secretary's arm. Unrebuffed, Brangwyn linked his arm in Lambert's and began a slow promenade with him over the

length of the room. Padley watched them in silence.

"How would you like to be posted to the Far East—say for two years?" the Foreign Secretary asked. "Eleanore might perhaps follow you later—when she's recovered—in a year or so."

"Is that a condition," Lambert asked—"that I should leave her behind?"

"It might be better," said the Foreign Secretary, "if you had time to get installed."

Lambert paused and turned to him.

"I'm very grateful to you for your offer, Andrew—very. You've been extremely considerate. But I could only accept . . ."

"You're a little premature," said Brangwyn, stiffening. "There is no offer for the moment. I am only anxious to put it to you that there are prospects of employment in the Foreign Service which you may not have foreseen." He spoke the last words decrescendo.

"At any rate," he said to Padley, "we can talk about that some other time."

"Is that all, sir?" Lambert asked.

"No," said the Foreign Secretary. "I'd almost forgotten why I asked you here." His voice was full and cheerful again. "Tell me, Martin. . . . How well do you know Augier?"

"I know him very well. I see him almost every day at the press conference. . . ."

"But do you know him socially, too?"

"Yes. I used to see a lot of him in America—not so much lately."

"How would you rate him?"

"Oh, he's first rate. Quite first rate. Probably the best of the French correspondents in London."

"And if you had to rank *Le Monde Populaire* with, say, *Figaro, Le Monde,* and *France Soir* . . ."

"*Le Monde Populaire*—well, it's got the third biggest circulation—it carries the best political reports—I would say that it's about the most important paper from the point of view of forming public opinion."

Lambert spoke in a crisp, official voice, the thought of Eleanore rejected to its familiar place in the undergrowth of his anxieties.

"Would you agree, James?" said Brangwyn.

"Oh, yes," said Padley, throwing the typescript that he had been fingering onto the table. "*Le Monde Populaire* proves that thighs and busts aren't the only way of building a mass circulation. It flatters every French prejudice—preaches the easy life—neutralism and all the rest of it—it's a very touchy paper, particularly where the Americans are concerned. . . ."

"They took offence," said Lambert, "when some American paper said that Marianne tucks her fee in the top of her silk stocking, and bilks."

"I quite agree—quite agree," said Brangwyn. "France may be a kept body, but she has her pride."

"Come, come, Andrew," said Padley. "The French . . ."

"Never mind that," said Brangwyn. "I don't want to hear the classic defence of France. Francophilia's the disease of the Foreign Office. Now, what about *Le Monde Populaire?*"

"The attitude of *Le Monde Populaire* to H.M.G.," said Lambert, "is, I'm afraid, one of candid friendship."

"That's very good," said Brangwyn, returning to his desk and making with his paper knife a design of pinpoints in his blotting-paper. "Very good indeed. *Le Monde Populaire* doesn't like the Rome Conference. . . ?"

"No," said Lambert. "By next Saturday it should be in full blast against it. . . ."

"When's the actual opening?" the Foreign Secretary asked, turning to Padley.

"On Saturday, there's the President's reception. The Bureau meets on Sunday. And the first session's today week," Padley answered.

Without comment, the Foreign Secretary walked to the window and stood there for a few moments with his back to Lambert and Padley. At last, he faced them, and said.

"Martin, I've a job for you."

"Yes, sir."

"It's a most important job. A most secret and confidential job. It shows the measure of our trust in you."

"I am very grateful." Lambert waited for Brangwyn to continue.

Instead, the Foreign Secretary offered Lambert a cigarette from the box on the table, absent-mindedly withdrew it before he could take one, and then lit a cigarette for himself.

"I smoke too much," Brangwyn said, and began to cough again.

At last, he said, "You must undertake never to divulge what we are about to discuss with you. You must never reveal that this meeting took place, and never in any circumstances—not in any circumstances—admit to any action that you may take as part of your duties."

"Yes, sir," said Lambert. "You've told me it's secret. I gave my undertaking when I entered the Foreign Service."

"Well, I'm not a professional diplomat," said the Foreign Secretary. "I am merely a businessman who lost his way and found himself in the Foreign Office. I only survive here," he added, playing with the fob of his thin watchchain, "because I've contracted a friendly alliance with the Permanent Under-Secretary and add a whiff of Magdalene to Throgmorton Street. . . . Now then, Martin! I want you to give me your solemn oath that what we now discuss will be secret at all times and in all circumstances."

"I do," said Lambert, looking towards Sir James Padley

who was picking with his fingernail at a stain on his lapel.

"Very well," said Brangwyn. "You see that typescript on the table." He pointed to the papers that Padley had been holding, and which now lay abandoned diagonally across a tray.

"Yes."

"Well, look at it."

Lambert picked up the typescript and glanced rapidly at the first paragraph.

"You see what it is," said the Foreign Secretary.

"It looks like the copy of a Cabinet paper."

"It's the draft of a Foreign Office submission to the Cabinet—a submission based on certain assumptions . . ."

"I see. . . ."

". . . which the French ought to know about. You see, Martin, the trouble with the French is that they've sunk into a political indifferentism. Whenever there's a crisis, they take to their beds. What they need is a shock . . . and they need it before the Conference. We want you, Martin, to see that they get it."

"You want me to?"

"Yes. Don't read it now."

With a start of resentment at the imperative voice, Lambert handed the papers back to Brangwyn, who turned the pages as he spoke.

"The theme of this submission is a simple one. It's this—that dependence on the Anglo-French alliance is an anachronism; it belongs to the days when our sea power had to be backed by a neighbouring infantry power."

"Yes, but . . ."

"No, no. I'm not going to argue this matter. I'm explaining this document. . . . My point is that we live in a new scientific age, and diplomacy hasn't caught up with it. The aeroplane, the rocket, the guided missile have made us all

neighbours, and the accident of geography that stuck us next to the French is no longer important. Britain's natural allies are the Germans."

He turned to Padley, and said parenthetically, "I do wish I could make you see that it's desirable and not a bad alternative, James."

"At any rate," he went on, "I want to give the French a last chance before the Rome Conference. I want them to know what I have in mind—that if they're not with us wholly and without reservation—then, as the Americans have put it, we'll go along with the Germans wholly and formally."

"Where do I come into this? Lambert asked. The Foreign Secretary was like a conjuror producing from his pocket a never-ending flag which had not yet formed into a design.

"I want the *Monde Populaire* to publish this paper by next Thursday. . . . It will be the biggest *fuite d'information* since the Ems telegram. You know the French press well, Martin. I want you to see that they get it. And I want you to describe it as the copy of an approved Cabinet paper. . . . That will be a convenience when we issue a formal denial later next week."

"But it is a genuine document—a secret document. . . ."

"Of course. It represents my views—my personal carbon —rescued by myself from incineration or shredding—or whatever they do with it."

"I see," said Lambert. The Foreign Secretary was holding the typescript towards him. "But if this paper is published —if it has an opposite effect? What if the shock causes a sort of paralysis?" Lambert asked.

The Foreign Secretary tapped his left hand with the papers. "That, I think, is my business," he said. "I'm only asking you to carry out a simple task."

Lambert looked at him directly. "It isn't a simple task.

It's easy to hand the paper over. That's nothing. What is difficult—"

"Rubbish," said the Foreign Secretary. "You're teetering on the edge of sanctimoniousness. What do you think diplomacy is? It's war continued by other means. . . ."

"Andrew," said Padley to Lambert, "is the greatest British statesman since Bismarck."

"The Germans," said Brangwyn, "were the first to admit that the only object of politics is power. Nothing is immoral that helps us to the purposes that we serve—our party, our cause, our country. That's the premise we must start from. So don't—"

Lambert had opened his mouth to speak.

"No, don't offer me any moral objections. I have nothing to gain from this. I have no political ambitions. I'm Foreign Secretary—but only because the Prime Minister called me to serve."

He had stretched himself to his full height, and was beginning an oration.

"I would have been content to stay in Parliament for another two or three years, and then to retire to the country. But this—" he fumbled for the right commonplace— "this is a dangerous world. We must all play our part. If I ask you to do this, Martin," he was now persuasive, "it's because it is a useful and important job that you can do better than anyone else. You'll be helping Britain. Here, take it."

"I'm sorry," said Lambert, withdrawing a half-step till his leg pressed against the seat of the arm-chair. "It isn't my line of country."

"Don't keep saying that," said the Foreign Secretary, with a spasm of irritation.

"It's the first time I've said it," Lambert said coolly.

"What right have you to assume," Brangwyn insisted, "that you are more moral and virtuous than we are?"

"I'm not assuming. . . ."

"Do you think we enjoy—" The Foreign Secretary stopped in the middle of his sentence, and smiled. "I hope you're not going to be silly," he said. "I understand your scruples. But this isn't news; it's strategy. You're a diplomat, not a journalist. As a giver of news, you'd be justified in refusing consciously to mislead a number of excellent people who trust you. But this is a much bigger question than that. It really is a matter of high diplomacy. Isn't that so, James?"

"Yes," said Padley.

"You may never again have a chance, Martin, of acting so directly as an instrument of your country's policy—not even if you become an ambassador. And heaven only knows, if you're not ready to take this opportunity . . ." He slapped his hand on the table so that a glass paperweight jumped.

Lambert stood uncertainly for a few moments, looking from the Foreign Secretary to Padley and back again. Padley nodded.

And, suddenly, the typescript seemed to Lambert like an invitation to end a phase of his life, the plodding hours at the Foreign Office, the arid press conferences, meetings, the flat in Portman Square, the weekly letter from Eleanore.

"There are prospects of employment . . . which you may not have foreseen," the Foreign Secretary had said. In a new environment, Dr. Fourneaux had said, away from her associations—that was it—away from her associations—Mrs. Lambert will have a greater sense of security. It showed the measure of the Foreign Secretary's trust. But Padley. He mattered more. He had trust in Padley—Padley with his thin, friendly, diffident face. Padley who had helped and protected him the second time Eleanore became ill

when Sir Arthur Baggott, the Head of the Western Department, had suggested his resignation. For Padley, to whom he had only spoken half a dozen times in private during the whole of his service, he felt both respect and affection, the reverential shyness of a fourth-form schoolboy before a well-bred headmaster.

Padley nodded. It was a nod of advice, a surreptitious, intimate nod.

"Well?" Brangwyn asked.

"Very well, sir," Lambert said. "I'll do it."

"Excellent," said the Foreign Secretary. "Take it and put it away in your pocket."

Lambert folded the papers and put them in his breast-pocket.

"Excellent," Brangwyn repeated. "Excellent . . . And by the way, Martin, when this is all over—what are you doing at the week-end?"

"I'm going to the country—apart from joining your send-off party on Saturday."

"Good. Keep out of the way. When we return," he was now smiling happily, "the Permanent Secretary will see you again—officially. We're going to post you to Japan. . . ."

"Japan." Lambert said after him.

"Yes, and you can send for Eleanore whenever she wants to go. . . ."

Lambert put his brief-case under his arm.

"I'm most grateful to you, sir. Most grateful. . . . I think Eleanore and I . . . that we'll have a better chance . . ."

"Let us leave that subject," said Brangwyn indifferently. "In this office we are primarily concerned with international matters. Spiritual and matrimonial affairs we leave to the clergy, the psychiatrists—and the courts. You will, I'm sure, be able to solve all your problems under the cherry trees.

Good-night—and don't forget Augier."

As Lambert turned to go, he suddenly stopped and said, "Just one thing. Will there be any record of this conversation?"

"No," said Brangwyn. "You need have no anxiety. There'll be no record, no minute—nothing."

The fog had settled over the streets like a steady snowfall, muffling sound and distorting familiar aspects. Lambert heard the voices of two policemen on duty in Downing Street, and felt his way past the bollards at the entrance of the Foreign Office towards the pavement on the other side of the road in the hope that a taxi might be parked at the bottom of the cul-de-sac. But the papers bulked against his chest like a warning. He changed his mind and, with his left hand touching the railings, walked towards the orange aura of a street-lamp that shone from the top of an invisible stanchion in Whitehall. The fog gave him comfort. It sheltered his secret. And the secret in turn gave him companionship. The Foreign Secretary and Sir James Padley were his partners, accomplices in responsibility.

In Whitehall, the pavements and roadway were confused in an ochreous miasma, occasionally freckled with the briefly visible lights of cars and buses in convoy, led by shouting men on foot. With his shoulder towards the Ministry of Health and keeping as his guide the lamp in the tower of the Houses of Parliament, Lambert groped his way yard by yard to a telephone box near the Home Office, repeating Augier's number.

II

SHE TOOK OFF her glasses, and her face smudged in the mirror. Below the left corner of her lip the small patch of acne that she had drenched with hot water earlier in the evening till it pricked with a flush of blood, became a powdered shadow. Carefully she raised her fingers towards her chin, her ears and her hair, to make sure that the red cluster was hidden, the unaccustomed rhinestone earrings still pendant, and her hair arranged like that of the model who stared at her from *Vogue*.

"But does your cream make-up cover every flaw, every freckle, every trace of fatigue—without turning your face into a mask? Does it stroke on in seconds, and last all day long?" the caption asked.

She had no doubt that it didn't; already in the last half-hour she had reconstructed her make-up four times, and even now she had not achieved the matt indifference, the soliciting challenge of the model's direct, unsmiling eyes and parted lips. She opened her mouth, and decided she had opened it too much. As though closing a pair of calipers, she gradually drew her lips together to the point of fashionable separation, a quarter of an inch from each other.

With her mouth composed, she turned to her school picture that stretched for three feet above the fireplace in a setting of horse brasses and red and green rosettes pinned

to the wall. They bracketed the years from Pony Club to Advanced Certificate. Miss Dorien and her staff. Miss Dorien and her staff in their skirts and jumpers and pearls and white hair waved for the photograph. Miss Bell, Miss Cheadle, Miss Fretts, Miss Bolton. There they were, among two hundred girls echeloned in chairs over the garden-triangle with the institutional background of the school behind them, rose windows, stone arches of Victorian Gothic and the four trees in summer leaf.

And she herself of only two years ago, straight-haired, her hands on her lap, identical with all the rest in her white blouse and cardigan, rigid, and praying, praying, praying that by some miracle the scum-laden water in the school baths might gurgle away and she be released from her commission to dive for the House, or at least that the photographer might ask for more and more sittings till the afternoon had dwindled and the swimming was cancelled.

Miss Bolton. Miss Bolton. The name evoked the terror of her school with its hours and clanging bells, the odour of wet mackintoshes in its corridors, stodge, prep, the games and the angry mistresses, and the gentle mistresses, the protectors and their favourites, and the nausea of examinations.

From downstairs, she could hear Lambert's voice and her father's punctuating assent. It was a formality that persisted in his retirement. During nearly thirty years in the Consular Service, Fergusson had learnt to signal his attention in the course of his interviews by a system of sympathetic murmurs, while his mind occupied itself with his closer and more personal interests. Even when he came to visit her at school—the signature J.F. on his postcards from Nice and Bogota and Santander, the portraits of churches, volcanoes and mediaeval saints, translated at last into a father—he still listened to her with the sounds of his profession.

She enjoyed the deference of her teachers towards her elderly father. If her mother, whom she barely remembered, had been alive, she might have been like all the other mothers, middle aged and behatted; or even like her own occasional aunts, thin, clipped and wearing tweed costumes, with whom, in a sad progress through Scotland and Devon at her father's designation, she spent her holidays. But he was different. When her father arrived at school, it was a ceremony. He came from abroad; he represented a Royal Majesty in whose family life the staff were much concerned; he was authorised to come on non-visiting days, so that while the other girls were in their classes, Valerie and he walked together across the empty Triangle.

Their day had a routine. Fergusson called for her in a taxi. Then they drove to a hotel, and had tea. He asked her questions about her teachers and games and her friends, till he had spent his conversation and for lack of it loaded her plate with pastries. Towards six o'clock, he used to say: "Must be getting back. Be a good girl." It was the moment when, after the hours of strangeness, she thought, "This is my father," and each of them began to feel that he had ownership in the other. The day was over. Her father took her hand, awkwardly as if expecting a rebuff, and she drove with him to the station.

"Good-bye, Valerie," her father said. "Let me know if you want anything." And to show his love he gave her a pound note instead of an embrace, while she, at every age—thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, her eyes blurring with tears, and her nose congested—would hold his sleeve for a moment, without words to say that she loved him or even to call him by some name.

Not that he was always tender and considerate. When he retired three years before and reopened Pelling Priory he had become peevish as if he resented his inactivity. One

day, after lunch, when Martin Lambert, a friend from the Foreign Office, had been staying with them, her father said in her presence, "I'm too old to get married again. And anyhow, I've had bad luck with my wives. I lost my first with my luggage and my vice-consul—locally recruited, of course—on the way to Bogota. My second was a Spanish royalist. She embarrassed me very much. She was lost flying to the Azores. My third . . ." But Lambert had risen and said, "Show me the garden, Valerie."

They went into the garden together, and Lambert took her hand as they walked in the hot sunshine over the irregular stone path that sprouted purple weeds from its crevices.

"It's very neglected," Valerie said. "We've only got one man to look after the whole garden, and Daddy hates gardening."

"I suppose," said Lambert, "he doesn't know the difference between a Cydonica Japonica and a Rubus Biflorus. . . ."

"Oh, yes," Valerie answered. "Daddy often helps me with botany. It's just that he likes thinking about things, not doing them."

"I see," said Lambert. She drew him through a tangle of peonies, phlox and Michaelmas daisies.

"We've got a wistaria three times as big as that at school," she said. "It's supposed to be the biggest in Surrey."

He hesitated before answering, and confused, she added, "It's the sandy soil."

"Yes," said Lambert, and took hold of a sprig to pluck it. The bush shook out a commotion of bees, and Valerie drew away.

"Don't be afraid," said Lambert, and handed her a small sprig of the wistaria. She smelt it, and put it in a buttonhole of her school blouse.

On their way back to the house, Lambert tried to inquire about her examinations. But she walked quickly ahead of him, her mind wholly excited by the surprising moment in which he had given her the blossom.

When they arrived at the house, she hurried upstairs to her room, and sat for ten minutes looking at the mauve wistaria. It was the first object in the drawer that she called her museum.

She pulled the drawer open, and fingered the crumbling wistaria, the two photographs which she had taken from an illustrated magazine, the newspaper cuttings.

"Birthdays: Mr. Martin Lambert, 39." That was her last addition from the *Daily Telegraph*. Then there was: "New Diplomatic Appointment: The Foreign Office announced yesterday that Mr. M. R. Lambert has been appointed Deputy Head of the News Department. Mr. Lambert, who is 36, was in the British Embassy in Paris in 1940 at the time of the fall of France. Since 1945, he has held a number of appointments in the United States. After a short period as principal Private Secretary to Mr. Gauntlet, he spent three years with the British delegation at Lake Success, before taking up his post with the Information Services."

That was from *The Times* of three years ago when he gave her the wistaria. And the photograph.

She raised it close to her face, and read the caption: "A Gay Party at Megève: Enjoying themselves in the snow is this young group of diplomats and their lovely wives. From left to right, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Lambert . . ."

Dwarfing a brilliant white Alp, with their skis piled in the snow behind them, Lambert and his wife in the centre

of a group of their friends were smiling at each other. In her black trousers and white jacket with its tight black hood, Lambert's wife, Valerie decided, looked exactly like the girl in *Vogue*. "Mr. and Mrs. Martin Lambert . . ." Valerie shut the drawer, and returned to the looking-glass. She'd have to go downstairs. Her father had already called her once.

She pulled at the wrinkling collar of the red dress that she had bought in Cirencester, and began to rehearse her entrance. He'd be sure to say, "Hello, Valerie. How you've changed! You were such a child. . . ." And she'd say, "One's bound to change, Mr. Lambert. Growing-up is a process of discarding things." It had the sophisticated ring of the aphorism by Miss Fretts, the English mistress, "Art is a process of selection."

"Growing-up is a process of discarding things," she said aloud at her image in the mirror. Too severe. She didn't like the stiffness in her voice. She smiled into her face, and began more casually. This time her voice was firm, but with a relaxed drawl that went with a light stir of her left eyebrow.

"Oh, you know, Martin," she said to herself aloud, "growing-up's a process of discarding things."

She didn't like that either. A voice like that needed a cigarette holder. She tried again.

"Well, I can't see myself. But I'm certain I must have changed. After all, Martin, I was only a child when we last met. One can't always wear pigtails." Her voice was loud and emphatic. A pause. "After all, growing-up is a process of discarding things."

As she finished this address to herself, she saw at the side of her face, like the materialisation of a familiar and unwanted spirit, her father's face.

"Discard the two curling pins at the back of your hair,

and come down at once," he said, and was gone.

"He heard me," she said to herself. "He heard me."

And a tremor of shame and indignity began in her legs and passed to her stomach and her hands. She fumbled for the pins in her hair, and left the room without switching off the light.

Lambert stood up when she entered, and stretched out his hand.

"Hello," he said. "It's appalling of me to turn up at ten to nine. But I did telephone your father. . . ."

"He told me. . . . What was the fog like? Did you have a bad journey?"

"It was pretty thick till I got out of London, and then, all of a sudden, I ran into a bright sunset."

"It's been absolutely clear here," said Fergusson. "Impossible even to imagine a fog. I've spent so many years looking at boringly blue skies. You give me a slight *nostalgie de la brume.*"

"It's like most nostalgias," said Lambert. "Satisfy it, and you'll be cured for ever. Like people who want to recapture the comradeship of air-raids."

"All right, all right," said Fergusson. "I wasn't serious. We hope you're going to stay the week. . . ."

"Till next Friday—except for tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Valerie asked.

"Yes. I've only come for brandy and breakfast. Tomorrow I've got to wave good-bye to the Foreign Secretary at Northolt."

"But you'll come back," she said quickly. "As soon as you can. . . ?"

"In the evening . . ."

"The disturbed week-end," said Fergusson. "It's the malady of the profession. I wish I could have the hours

again that I've spent greeting and saying good-bye to unwelcome visitors on Saturday and Sunday . . . drunken sailors, standard tourists, lunatic Englishwomen, Cabinet Ministers . . . the whole lot of them."

"I'll leave without ceremony. I promise. . . ."

"No, you won't," said Fergusson. "I've delegated all protocol to Valerie. When she goes into the Foreign Service . . ."

"Are you, Valerie?" Lambert asked. Relaxed in the leather arm-chair, he smiled to her as she sat on a high-backed chair with her hands folded on her lap.

"Oh, no. Don't believe a word Father says. I really don't know what I'm going to do. St. Anne's to begin with . . ."

"But that's excellent. When do you go up?"

"Next year, I hope. . . . I'm spending this year at home looking after Daddy."

Lambert turned to her father. "You're very lucky. The leisured domestic life." He looked around at the book-cases and said, "All the books in the world, all the time to read them . . ."

"Rubbish," said Fergusson. "You wouldn't want them if you had them. Give him some more brandy, Valerie. . . . You like conferences, news, denials, anonymity, power. . . ."

"I've no power," said Lambert with a laugh. "I'm not even a voice. I'm a channel."

Valerie took the heavy bottle of Armagnac and began to fill his glass. But as she did so, its weight slowly toppled the glass over the edge of the table.

"Look out, Valerie," her father called, and stretched forward, too late. The brandy spilled from the unbroken glass in a pale stain over the carpet.

"My dear girl," Fergusson said, "why don't you wear your glasses? You know you're blind as a bat without them."

"I'm so sorry," Valerie answered, wiping the brandy with her handkerchief. "Terribly sorry." Her neck and face reddened.

"It was all my fault," said Lambert. "I caught the glass with the edge of my sleeve. Sorry, John," he said to Fergusson. "Treat it as a libation. It's the best Armagnac I've drunk in years."

"It's the remains of a dozen bottles I got when I was *en poste* at Nantes," said Fergusson, appeased. "My God, what a place! I was there for over a year. A sort of third-rate Bristol. You've got to be a painter to be able to bear it. And that for only two days. When you've done the quays . . ."

"Do you mind if we hear the news?" Lambert interrupted him. "I'd like to hear if there's anything from France on the leak."

Valerie switched on the wireless and Lambert rose, and stood with his back against the fireplace, hands in pockets, waiting for the announcer's voice to come from the mahogany cabinet.

"Further outlook. Cloudy over much of Scotland and northern Ireland; some bright intervals likely in southern and eastern England; elsewhere persistent fog. . . ."

"Poor Mr. Lambert," said Valerie. "I'm so sorry for you —having to drive back through the fog."

"The United States delegation has arrived in Rome for the Conference which will hold its inaugural session at Quirinal on Monday. The British delegation is expected tomorrow. . . ."

Lambert leaned over the set that had begun to crackle.

"My dear boy," said Fergusson. "You mustn't admire your own work so conspicuously. It's only this morning that you gave them all this."

Lambert raised his hand as the announcer went on.

"The French Cabinet met again this morning to discuss the publication by *Le Monde Populaire* of an alleged British Cabinet paper. An interpellation has been tabled by M. LeMaistre, Independent, asking the French Government to postpone its participation in the Rome Conference till a debate has taken place. . . .

A Foreign Office spokesman said today in London that it was not for Her Majesty's Government to confirm or deny the authenticity of irresponsible reports."

Lambert switched the wireless off.

"I don't see that," said Valerie. "Why doesn't the Foreign Office. . . ?"

"The Foreign Office!" Fergusson echoed contemptuously.

"If the Foreign Office were to try and deny canards," Lambert said to Valerie, "it would mean that everyone left undenied would be assumed to be true. Besides," he added, "the Foreign Office sometimes likes to keep the world guessing."

"The F.O. never lies," said Fergusson, rotating his brandy glass in his cupped hands, "but sometimes it only tells half the truth. It's quite clear that the French have got on to something—don't say 'Yes' or 'No,' Martin—I've never for a moment thought we were security-tight at the Foreign Office. After all, why should we assume that we're any more free from Communists than the State Department?"

"Because," said Lambert, "there's an older, more conservative mood in Britain."

"And?"

"And in any case, the British Foreign Service has been recruited from a narrower, more reliable range than the State Department."

"But in the late 1930s—don't you think there were Communists at the Universities, men who later went into the Civil Service?"

"Well?"

"Of course there were, Martin. Don't be naïve. There must have been dozens of them and they're still there . . . all of them hugging their guilt and some of them making private penance."

"But this leak," said Lambert. "Do you think the report was leaked by a Communist in the Department?"

"Why not?" said Fergusson. "Valerie, give Martin another brandy—and mind the bottle. . . . Why not, Martin? . . . What about that fellow . . . what's his name . . . Sparr-Gamby in the Western Division?"

"Oh, he's all right," said Lambert. "He's only become a traditional reference because someone asked a question about him in the House."

"I've never heard of him," said Valerie. "What did he do?"

"Nothing much," said Lambert. "He once wrote a rather dreary article on 'Realism in Russian Literature' for a leading Communist review . . . edited by a very respectable poet who has now recanted and edits a leading anti-Communist review."

"That may be," said Fergusson. "I only mention him as the part of the iceberg above the water. What about the rest? I've absolutely no faith in the security system at the Foreign Office—absolutely none. After all, look at Jones. Why was he put in charge of security?"

He emptied his glass of Armagnac and recharged it.

"There was a vacancy—the Americans started complaining about security. . . . And Brangwyn looked around for somebody to do the job. Then one evening, he was at a din-

ner party . . . about twelve of them. Jones was there from the Foreign Office . . . sat next to Brangwyn. . . . Didn't say a single word the whole evening. And on the way back, Brangwyn said to Padley in the car 'I've found just the man for security. *Jones.* Knows how to keep his mouth shut.' "

"Well," said Lambert, "the only time I've ever heard Jones say anything was at a meeting when Brangwyn asked him to give a report on security."

"Careful, Martin," said Fergusson, "Valerie's listening to you entranced."

"Oh, Daddy," Valerie protested.

"It isn't a great secret," said Lambert. "Jones reported . . . you know, in that cracked, undertaker's voice. . . . 'The Secret Waste is destroyed each morning.' And that was all."

"The man's hopeless," said Fergusson. "The papers are absolutely right."

"They're very excited about the whole thing," said Lambert.

"There was a lovely leader this morning," said Valerie. She picked up a newspaper, and spread it over her knees at the foot of the arm-chair where Lambert had taken a seat. "Do listen!"

She began to read: " 'Talk, talk, talk. There's always talk of security at the Foreign Office. If security were built by talk alone, a major Cabinet paper would not be hawked on the boulevards today.' " She glanced down the column. "They're simply furious with Jones. 'Sir Wystan Gorse-Jones must go. For why? We must show the world that the Foreign Office can be trusted. . . . There are younger men ready to take his place, men with a spirit of adventure, men who believe in the Empire. . . .' That's you, Martin," she ended.

Her father looked at her quickly. "You see how it is," he said to Lambert. "You see how soon our juniors become our familiars."

He sat in silence for a few moments, and then said, "However the thing leaked out, it's certainly shaken the French."

"There won't be any more talk of neutralism," said Lambert.

"Except by the neutralists. Do you really think, Martin, that this leakage has done anything except scare them stiff? And for every Frenchman it frightens to our side, it'll frighten three away. Brangwyn ought to be impeached."

"Why?" said Lambert quickly.

"For stupidity and slackness in security. It's the most damaging thing that's happened to us for ten years. . . . Why the devil . . . You know, you can't bully the French into loving you."

"It's too early to say," said Lambert. "I'll tell you more next week. Somehow, though, I think Andrew isn't your favourite Minister."

"He isn't. I've known him too long. I knew him when he first got into the House—a stuttering Front Bencher straight from the City. The worst Minister of Labour we've ever had. Everything he touched came off in his hand. Never a crisis without a strike. . . ."

"Yes," said Lambert, "But every strike was settled. . . ."

"With the bitterest of memories," said Fergusson. "I knew him after he lost his seat, too—he was a sort of political ambulance-chaser, always looking for a by-election. When any M.P. fell ill, he'd invariably ring up and ask after his health. Everyone knew that when he said, 'How are you?' he meant, 'I trust you're dying.' "

"Oh, Daddy," said Valerie.

"But of course—" said Fergusson. He was becoming angry, and his face reddened under his white hair— "I'm

not suggesting that Brangwyn's an insensitive man. Oh, no! You should see him at Question Time in the House when he's being attacked. Most sensitive, I assure you! He goes yellow, his lip trembles, his papers flutter . . . he's a very sensitive fellow. But give him the chance to send a Note to . . . to Iceland. . . . Then you'll see the stuff he's made of. . . ."

"I don't agree at all," Lambert said curtly. "I think he's a man of great ability."

"I'm sorry, Martin. I'm offending you. I forgot you're related to him."

"Only by marriage—my elder half-sister whom I never meet is his wife. We all treat each other with the strictest formality. She regards me as being slightly disreputable."

Fergusson shrugged his shoulders. "That's the destiny of younger half-brothers. How's Eleanore?"

Lambert had raised his glass to his mouth, but he paused half-way and put it down.

"She hasn't been very well," he answered. "She's at Bandol. Actually, I'm expecting a telephone call from her. . . ."

"I see," said Fergusson.

"She's so beautiful," said Valerie.

"When did you see her?" Lambert asked.

"I've only seen her photographs," Valerie replied.

"She's better looking than her photographs," said Fergusson.

"She was very ill in the summer," said Lambert, and he remembered her as he had left her in the clinic at Bandol, her eyes shut and rimmed with blue, a trace of sweat on her forehead, her bare arm dangling as in defeat over the side of the bed, and the nurse preparing to untie the mosquito net.

"I do wish you'd bring her to see us one day," Valerie said. "I'd so much . . ."

"Yes," said Lambert. "What are you going to read when you go up?"

At ten o'clock, after Fergusson had spent half an hour in reminiscence of his post at Santander, he suddenly got up and said, "Bed!"

Lambert rose as well, but Fergusson said, "There's no hurry, Martin. Give him a whisky and soda, Valerie," and walked heavily to the door.

"Can I get you anything, Daddy?" Valerie asked.

"No," said Fergusson. "Don't stay up late."

"He's so lonely," Valerie said when he had shut the door. "He goes to bed every night at ten—he goes to his room, and shuts himself away. I don't think he sleeps. I sometimes see his light burning for hours. And when he takes sleeping pills, he's so bad tempered next day."

"And what about you?" Lambert asked. "Have you many friends?"

"Not many," said Valerie. "Since Father's come here, he hasn't really wanted to meet anyone."

"But doesn't he invite people to meet you?"

"Oh, no—at least, hardly ever. But I don't really mind. When I go up to St. Anne's, I suppose I'll meet lots of people."

"Why didn't you go up this year—you could have tried the other places, couldn't you?"

Valerie began to press the trigger of the soda-siphon, and Lambert took it from her hand.

"You've got to be careful," he said. "Otherwise it'll squirt all over the table."

"Yes," she answered.

"Why aren't you going up this year?" he insisted.

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose it's because I wanted to keep Daddy company. And he was terribly keen on me spending a year at home. . . ."

"But it's—it's so lonely for you," Lambert said. "Good lord, at your age you ought to be having fun—not stuck here looking at cows."

"I like it," Valerie said. "I like it very much. I love the country. I couldn't bear to live in London."

"Oh, well," said Lambert. "I mustn't try and make you restless."

"You won't make me restless," said Valerie. "I don't know about Daddy. I noticed how he brightened up when you spoke of the Foreign Office. And he got so furious about the report. I've never known him take such an interest. . . ."

"Your father's an exceptional man," said Lambert. "Don't underrate him, Valerie. I've known and liked him for years."

"Oh, he's terribly fond of you, too—terribly. You can't imagine how he's been looking forward to your coming here. All of a sudden, he seemed to become years younger. He spent the whole of yesterday morning cleaning the guns in case you wanted to go rabbiting."

"That's very touching," said Lambert.

"You're not being ironic?" she asked suspiciously.

"No, not in the least bit. Your father is one of the few really kind men I've ever met. Even when he gets tough . . ."

"Oh, he does with me sometimes. He says he has to like someone very much before he'll bother to be rude to him. He told me, though, that you're the prime illustration of the crassness of the Foreign Office. . . ."

Lambert laughed.

"You mean," he said, "that I . . ."

"Oh, no, not you—the Foreign Office. Daddy thinks they're stupid not to have promoted you years ago. You see, he's got his own grudge against the Foreign Secretary."

"Yes."

"He didn't really want to retire. . . ."

"No, I know he didn't."

"He was so certain they were going to make him Consul General in Chicago. It was Brangwyn who stopped it. He said Daddy was too old."

Lambert gave a short laugh, and Valerie looked up at him in surprise.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked. "Didn't you like Chicago?"

"I liked it to begin with—yes. Not so much later on. We had a house on the North Side by the lake."

"I wish," said Valerie, clasping her arms around her knees, "I wish you'd tell me something about all the places you've been to. All my life I've been related to people who travel, and I've never been anywhere myself. . . ."

" 'You change your place not your soul when you cross the sea'—have you ever read the *Epistles?*"

"Yes, we did them last term. Horace was a tired, unhealthy old cynic when he wrote that. He'd exhausted himself with debauchery, and when he couldn't enjoy Baiae any more, he said travel was a bad thing. I want to travel everywhere—Italy, France, Greece. All those lovely places that end in 'a' and 'o.' I long to go to Perugia. Perugia! Don't you think it's got a wonderful sound? Perugia! Perugia!"

She got up, and collected the glasses from the tables, and Lambert watched her contentedly.

"Have you seen the Exhibition of Italian Art at Burlington House?" she asked, returning to her place on the cushion at the side of his arm-chair. Lambert hesitated for a mo-

ment, and answered, "Yes . . . I went specially to see the Giorgione."

"The lovely one . . . the one on the poster . . ."

"I sat looking at it half an hour."

From three fifteen to nearly a quarter to four on the day after the Foreign Secretary had given him the papers, he had sat on the padded bench in front of the "Concert," waiting for Augier's messenger. "He will say," Augier had told him, " 'The Louvre is generous to lend it.' "

Around him, the changing observers admired the picture, and Lambert pressed with his finger-tips the papers folded in the catalogue. At a quarter to four, a young man next to him took out a packet of Gaullois, smiled apologetically and put them back in his raincoat. He looked from Lambert to the Giorgione and said, "The Louvre is generous to lend it."

"Yes," said Lambert. He had placed the catalogue at his side. When the young man rose, Lambert said, "I think this is your catalogue."

"For half an hour. . . ." Valerie repeated. "How wonderful! I do so love that picture. We've got a reproduction of it in one of the Phaidon books."

She brought the volume from the shelves, and they held it together on his knees. With his left hand on the spine of the book, he felt her fingers resting lightly on his.

"We did the Renaissance in history," she said. "I was hopeless—to begin with."

"Yes," said Lambert, turning the pages with his right hand.

"I adored Cellini's autobiography," Valerie said.

"Yes," said Lambert.

The night was soundless, except for the occasional crackle

from the fire, and the Foreign Office seemed in his recollection like a vast store that had shut and was silent.

"Miss Bolton—she was 'history'—Miss Bolton was always talking about the *Cinque cento*. It was a most frightful affectation."

"Frightful," said Lambert. He looked down at Valerie's burning face, her eyes staring fixedly at the pages, and felt with the back of his hand her cold fingers. Beyond her head, he could see the great carved chimney-piece and her father's pipe-rack. Ever since he had known Fergusson, when Valerie was still a child, the pipe-rack had been like a trade-mark of Fergusson's presence.

"I think," said Lambert, abruptly closing the book, "it's time for bed."

"Yes," said Valerie. She straightened the creases from her dress.

"Well, good-night," said Lambert.

"Good-night," said Valerie.

She looked away from him.

III

WITHIN THE PRIVATE departure lounge of the airport, Brangwyn's staff waited for him to speak. He had risen from his green leather arm-chair and, humming ill-temperedly to himself, had studied the portrait of the Queen, fingered the model of the Boreas, and now peered towards the aircraft on the marshalling apron about a hundred yards away. The fog that earlier in the day enclosed the runways had lifted to expose a wintry sun and a gauzy view of the buildings on the far side.

Brangwyn stood with his feet spread on the large squares of the chequered floor, and the officials anxiously watching his frown waited for him to speak.

"Perhaps," said Brangwyn, "we might use the occasion for a game of chess."

His staff laughed complaisantly, and Brangwyn joined them with a brief, controlled smile before casting a quick glance at the murky, fog-smeared fanlight of the low ceiling.

"You will correct me if I'm wrong," said Brangwyn, "but I'm rapidly coming to the conclusion that the slowest form of travel is air travel."

"I do correct you," his wife said. "You always exaggerate!"

The four members of the Foreign Secretary's staff composed their faces into neutrality.

"I don't know why you men are always in such a hurry. The plane's only been delayed two hours."

"Two hours and four minutes," said Padley.

"Well, what of it?" Mrs. Brangwyn said. "It's given us more time for coffee and chat. . . . Darling," she added, putting her hand on her husband's arm, "have you got the aspirins?"

"No, dear," he answered. "You've got them in your handbag."

She opened her suède bag, grabbled inside for a few moments, and said, "So I have. Do remind me, James, to give them to Andrew before you take off. And make sure that he has two tonight. . . ."

"Oh, really, Mary," said the Foreign Secretary.

"He's so careless about himself," she went on. "And the weather is quite awful. Now you won't forget. . . ."

Brangwyn began to cough, and Vosper, his Private Secretary, refilled his cup with coffee.

"The best . . . thing . . . to be said . . . for . . . flying . . . on a filthy day like this," he said between his spasms, "is that . . . in a few hours . . . we'll be . . . in sunshine. Sunshine!"

Outside, although it was only half past three, the airfield was again wrapped in a thick gloom, uninterrupted except for the receding lights along the approach path to the runway and the blurred radiance from the waiting aircraft.

"Any news?" the Foreign Secretary called out to the airways officer who was approaching his table. The officer saluted and said, "It's still pretty thick on the other side, sir. Three hundred visibility, smoke haze, cloud eight/eight at six hundred feet. . . . I'm very sorry, sir."

Brangwyn tapped the side of the cup with his coffee-spoon, and started humming to himself.

The officer stood awkwardly with his hands at his side, as

if waiting for instructions. At last, to break the silence, he said, "We're taking on more fuel, sir—another fifty gallons. . . ."

"Thank you," said Brangwyn. "Thank you very much. When are we likely to get off?"

"We're hoping, sir, in about half an hour. We think it's clearing a bit. . . ."

"Never heard such nonsense," said Mrs. Brangwyn. "It's getting perceptibly thicker. I think we all ought to go home and try again tomorrow."

The Foreign Secretary looked at her affectionately, and she squeezed his hand.

"I just want to hold on to you another day, sweetie," she said. "There ought to be a law against Foreign Secretaries leaving their wives behind. . . . And besides, you haven't told me about the book-case. . . ."

"Which book-case?"

"The one at Telfers. Do you want it or don't you?"

"My dear Mary . . . this is hardly the time. . . ."

"Well, when *is* the time?" she asked angrily. "You're always too busy. . . ."

Forgotten, the duty officer withdrew, and Vosper engaged the other members of the staff in a diversionary conversation while Brangwyn applied himself to settling the problem of the book-case.

In the adjoining lounge, Lambert was answering questions put to him by the journalists who were waiting for the Foreign Secretary. Although it was only half past three, the strip lighting was already on, darkening by the contrast the airfield where the fog, fluctuating and uncertain, seemed to be thickening.

A fair-haired American in glasses, who scarcely moved his lips, said, "Well, what are you hoping to get out of this

Conference? It seems like the old ones that failed. Same cast, different theatre—French farce set in Rome."

Lambert gave him a friendly smile that compensated for his own prejudices. "It's a different play," he said. "And this is off the record. . . . We're hoping the French are going to be more forthcoming this time. . . ."

"Why?" the American persisted.

"Because they don't want to be isolated."

"You mean—as *Le Monde Populaire* . . ."

"I don't mean anything of the kind," Lambert answered. He was wondering if amiability towards Ulmer was the most useful attitude, after all. "We're not responsible for what *Le Monde Populaire* prints. . . ."

A number of journalists began to speak at the same time, but Ulmer's voice overbore them. *"Le Monde Populaire,"* he insisted, "has just published—exposed—what they consider a threat—a threat to France—blackmail, they call it—offered to them by Britain. I want to know . . ."

"What were you saying, Peter?" Lambert said calmly to Wilding who, as the senior diplomatic correspondent, ambassadorial in dress and manner, had taken the wicker-chair in front of the Foreign Secretary's vacant place.

Wilding said, "I really was on the same point. The French reaction to this—well, call it whatever you like—this disclosure . . ."

"Not disclosure."

"All right—to this alleged disclosure—has been surprising. It has somehow rallied the French in a contrary sense to what one might have expected. Would you agree that the stir of Anglophobia and anti-Americanism in France . . . ?"

Lambert interrupted him.

"I'm sorry, Peter. All that's a matter of opinion. I can only tell you that in my view the French public is more solidly with the West today than ever before. It's a good

omen for the Conference."

"Like the weather," said Ulmer, returning to his inquiries in the lull that followed Lambert's reply. "Tell me, Mr. Lambert, do you—I mean the Foreign Office—do you think that Communists have had anything to do with the leakage?"

"No," said Lambert.

"Well, then . . ." Ulmer flung himself on the reply like a wrestler whose opponent has stumbled.

"We do not accept that there has been any leakage," Lambert said.

"But there may be?"

Lambert didn't answer.

"We take it there may be . . ." Ulmer went on.

"I'm sorry," said Lambert. "All that's hypothetical. There are two Parliamentary questions to the Prime Minister next week."

Ulmer leaned back in his arm-chair, and took his cigarette from one of the chrysanthemum pots that surrounded the room. The cigarette had died in an earthy mould and Ulmer threw it on the ground in distaste.

"But if a *fuite* had taken place—" Wilding ejected the French word in the middle of his carefully articulated phrase as if to give it a full dramatic value—"that really would be a grave matter for the Foreign Office. After all—a Cabinet paper! . . ." He waited for an answer.

"Could we have a reply?" asked the correspondent of the *Herald,* a former Parliamentary reporter, who brought to press conferences the style and technique of the House of Commons.

"I had the impression," Lambert said courteously, "that Peter was making a comment."

"Oh, no," said Wilding. "It was a *nonne* question—expecting the answer 'yes.' "

"In that case," said Lambert, "I can give you the answer. The leakage of a Cabinet paper—even a Foreign Office paper—to a foreign country . . ."

"To anyone," said Wilding.

"Yes, to anyone . . . would be . . ."

The journalists waited attentively as Lambert prepared the adjective. "It would be—not undisturbing. . . . Here's the Foreign Secretary."

The journalists turned their heads to the door, and those seated rose, as Brangwyn and Sir James Padley, followed by the secretaries, walked towards the vacant arm-chair which the airline had set in a bower of greenery to celebrate the occasion. Brangwyn, unsmiling, beckoned them to be seated. In a slow half-circle, he moved his glance over the correspondents, paused for a second at his wife, who was standing in the doorway, continued his survey, and said, "Well, gentlemen."

The lights for the film cameras bloomed like suns, radiant and hot, into the Foreign Secretary's face.

"Too bad—the weather," said Ulmer.

"It's what we expect at this time of the year," said Brangwyn. He took out a cigarette, and three of his secretaries hurried to light it.

"I wonder, sir . . ." said the correspondent of *Midi-Soir.*

"After all," the Foreign Secretary went on, "it isn't so long since our national specialities were thought to be spleen and fog."

"I wonder, sir," said the correspondent of *Midi-Soir,* "if you would say something about the leakage. As you know, it's causing some anxiety in France."

"Anything I said on that subject would be improper—and that's not for publication. But I will say this—" the Foreign Secretary leaned forward and pointed with his finger towards the French journalist. "Nobody and nothing

can separate the British and French peoples—" he hesitated and formed the phrase—"who are bound together in indissoluble friendship."

"They're saying in Paris—my office called me half an hour ago—that you've called the French army a 'two-day army.' That's been rankling on the Right as well as on the Left. Is that your evaluation?"

"I'm not responsible for French press reports," Brangwyn said bluntly.

"But they're saying . . ."

"I'm not concerned with what they're saying. You mustn't come to me for an exegesis of the Paris apocrypha."

During the laughter that followed, Ulmer wiped his glasses.

"But, Mr. Brangwyn . . ." he persisted.

"He's a menace, that chap," Lambert said in an undertone to Padley. "You can count on him to add an anticlimax to every climax."

"Mr. Brangwyn," said Ulmer. "I gather the Communists in Paris are making some capital out of this document. Can we assume—whether it was a leak or a piece of fiction—that the Communists had a hand in it?"

"I can only give you concrete information," said Brangwyn with a deprecating smile. "You must rely for your conclusions on your own invention."

Brangwyn's staff laughed, the correspondents laughed and Ulmer threw up his hands.

The duty officer came and whispered in Vosper's ear.

"What's that?" said Brangwyn.

"The captain's compliments, sir," the officer said. "He got your message. He says it's clearing a bit—but he felt it might be better . . ."

"Give the captain my compliments," said Brangwyn,

"and tell him I feel it might be better if we took off as soon as possible."

"I do wish the Foreign Secretary wouldn't try and boss the pilot," said Padley to Lambert. "He'll never learn that they always use their own judgment."

The electric light in the lounge was becoming paler as the fog outside thinned again from a yellow-black murk to grey.

"It's drifting," said Lambert. "It shouldn't be long now."

With half his thought, as if listening to familiar music, tired, and, for the first time since Brangwyn had handed him the papers, at ease, Lambert listened to the Foreign Secretary answering a number of general questions about the Rome Conference. During the night that he kept the report in his flat, he had sat fully dressed, reading, intermittently touching his breast-pocket for reassurance, determined not to sleep till he had delivered his papers to Augier's "stringer." But later the following afternoon, though liberated from his responsibilities, he had left the Royal Academy still loaded with a burden of anxiety. If Brangwyn ordered him to hand the report over, it must be right to do so. It wasn't for him to make policy. All he had to do was carry it out. His new posting would be a coincidence, not a reward. Brangwyn had asked him to do it because he thought well of him, because he trusted him, because he had authority over him, because he could compel him, because he alone could release him. And Lambert remembered the coastal road from St. Tropez to Le Lavandou, and Eleanore's staring eyes as she drove through the darkness towards the car-headlights that rose and wandered like searchlights over the dips in the hills.

Because Brangwyn had authority over him, he had agreed. And because it was convenient. A Far East posting. And because it was right. Brangwyn and Padley had both said so.

It was a deception. But sometimes a deception was necessary. Not a deception—a feint, a mode of persuasion. It happened every day. The State Department—the Quai d'Orsay—they all did it. The French had done it a thousand times. The deceivers would themselves be cuckolded.

Everything was all right. The report had appeared: the uncertainty was over; the rest was Brangwyn's affair.

Lambert watched the Foreign Secretary, his heavy neck spilling in little folds over his white collar, and thought of the Fergussons, quiet and remote. He had known Fergusson for nearly fifteen years, and Valerie for three. Fergusson, the lordling of obscure places—in South America and Lichtenstein, Salonika, Porto Rico, Morocco and Spain. He had met him, a host or guest, on the fringe of conferences when great companies of diplomats or officials arrived for international meetings and the consuls helped in the entertainment of the British delegation. Since those days, Fergusson had shrivelled.

But Valerie. She had seen him off at eight that morning, handed him an unwanted packet of sandwiches as he climbed into his car, and enjoined him to drive carefully. He had looked at her young face, and her hands red with the morning cold, and said, "See you soon." Then she had run ahead of the car to the heavy gate leading to the lane by the river and swung it open, and stood laughing and waving to him as he drove away.

"Right-y-o, sir!" said an officer from the doorway.

"Will all passengers for Flight GWF kindly proceed to the aircraft?" a voice came over the loudspeaker.

In a sudden uprising, pushing on hats, taking up briefcases, the Foreign Office officials, with smiles and handshakes, followed Brangwyn and Sir James Padley to the swing-doors that were held open by a stewardess.

"Darling, can I see you right onto the plane?" Mrs. Brangwyn asked.

The Foreign Secretary halted just inside the door, through which the fog blew in wisps.

"No," he said. "It's not encouraged. Didn't you see the notice? In any case, it's very cold outside. Why not stay here, Mary?"

"I wanted to give you this," she said, and began to pin a small black cat, made of wool, onto his overcoat.

The photographers' bulbs flashed brilliantly around them, and Brangwyn's eyes that had started with tears at his wife's gesture, recovered their professional glaze as he smiled for the cameras.

"Once again, ma'am," said a photographer, and Mrs. Brangwyn repinned the mascot for a second series of photographs.

"Good luck, sir," a journalist shouted. The cry was taken up by others, and Brangwyn waved.

Raising his coat collar, Lambert walked with the Foreign Office party along the concrete of the marshalling apron as far as the gangway, and waited for Brangwyn to shake hands with him. But after a couple of flaccid handshakes to the airport commandant, and the chairman of the airways company, the Foreign Secretary began to cough and hurried into the aeroplane. Sir James Padley stayed outside till the last moment.

"I hate the damn things," he said with a gesture to the aeroplane. "I stay out of them as long as I can."

"Time to embark, sir," said an officer.

"Good-bye, Martin," Padley said.

"Good-bye, James."

"You did very well . . ."

"Thank you."

". . . although it didn't quite come off."

Lambert smiled as he shook hands with Padley.

"I'm afraid it's kicked back a bit."

"Don't worry. In ten days' time no one will remember it. See you in London."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Lambert returned to the lounge, glad of its bright warmth after the damp of the airfield.

"Oh, lord, I've forgotten to give Andrew the aspirins," Mrs. Brangwyn suddenly complained. "Quick, somebody. Is it too late to send them out there? Stewardess . . ."

The aircraft, which had fallen silent after the engines had warmed up, began to throb again, and trundled forward towards the runway, till at last it disappeared from sight into the thick, discoloured atmosphere. Mrs. Brangwyn pressed her face anxiously against the window, her suède handbag crumpled between her fingers.

"It's all right, madam, they'll soon be up," said the receptionist, who had been leaning forward over Mrs. Brangwyn's shoulders.

"Of course they'll soon be up," Mrs. Brangwyn said sharply. "People who are anxious about aeroplanes shouldn't fly."

"Anything I can get for you, madam?"

"If I know Andrew," Mrs. Brangwyn said, ignoring her, "he'll fall fast asleep, and won't wake up till he gets to Rome. What time are you going back to London?"

"I'm waiting for the fog to clear a bit, and then I'm going on to the country," Lambert answered.

"Well, let's have tea," said Mrs. Brangwyn. "And you tell me who wants to be what, who's sleeping with who—whom—and you know, everything. But first of all, tell me how Ellen is!"

"Eleanore!" Lambert said.

"That's what I said," Mrs. Brangwyn replied.

Lambert straightened himself, prepared to offer again the euphemisms that Mrs. Brangwyn expected to hear as she settled herself in the wicker-chair with the safe, expectant expression of one about to watch a fight from a comfortable seat. Lambert ordered tea, and, in the same tone, said to Mrs. Brangwyn:

"She's drinking less."

"Drinking?"

"Yes. I thought you knew. She's been in a nursing home near Toulon. . . ."

Mrs. Brangwyn took a file of magazines from the table and placed it on her knees.

"I'm so sorry. . . . I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"Didn't you?" said Lambert. "I thought everyone knew. The last time it happened—she pushed her fist through a thick windowpane. . . ."

"What a terrible thing to happen. An accident . . ."

"It wasn't an accident. It was deliberate."

From the public lounge came the sound of singing. A party of French students, men and women who had already been fog-bound for ten hours and were stretched out on benches or bivouacked on the floor, had begun to sing in chorus. Their voices, inharmonious, were an alien imprecation addressed to the wavering fog that had teased them for a few moments when the Foreign Secretary's aeroplane had taken off but had now descended again, stifling and brown, to form smudges on the windowpanes, like the droppings of a myriad beetles.

"What's that noise?" Mrs. Brangwyn asked. The tea she was pouring slopped into the saucer.

"That awful row?" said Lambert. "They're singing *'La Bibelotte'*—it's—"

"No, don't be silly," said Mrs. Brangwyn. "Listen. Can't you hear?"

Lambert put his biscuit on the plate and listened.

"I can't hear anything—nothing except a ghastly din."

Mrs. Brangwyn finished pouring out the tea, and was about to raise the cup to her mouth when she stopped and said:

"There it is again. Listen!"

Punctuating the intervals of singing was the groan of an aircraft's engines, rising and falling, fading and returning, insistent and plaintive. Lambert and Mrs. Brangwyn listened till the sound ebbed away.

"Somebody's trying to get in, I suppose," said Lambert.

"It's a horrible sound," said Mrs. Brangwyn. "The sound of an aeroplane in the fog . . . or at night. It isn't like the sound of a train. A train's warm and sheltered—even in a fog. But a plane . . . Do listen, Martin," she put her hand on his arm. "It's back again. It's like a child crying."

"Don't worry about it," Lambert said. "They've got the whole thing absolutely buttoned up. When there's a fog like this, they come in by radar."

With an emphatic, comforting dogmatism, he reassured her, and she smiled.

"I suppose Andrew must be over the Channel by now," she said. "He's been gone nearly a quarter of an hour."

"Bound to be. I wish I were. I'm not looking forward to a long drive in this."

"Everything all right, Mrs. Brangwyn?" said the officer of the airline who had attended on the Foreign Secretary. He had an easy courtesy that pleased both Lambert and Mrs. Brangwyn.

"Everything's excellent," she said. "So glad the Foreign Secretary got away as he did. Frightfully clever of you."

The officer didn't reply.

"Do tell me something," she said—she put her fingers in her ears—"I simply can't stand the sound of that plane—it's as if it's lost. . . ."

"Oh, no," said the officer calmly. "We never lose planes. They're all under control."

"Well, tell me how they do it."

She went to the window and raised the edge of the curtain. "I can't see a hand's breadth."

"It's a bit technical, madam. It's all done by what we call G.C.A.—ground-controlled approach. You see, say you're a pilot . . . There's a fellow—the talk-down controller—who'll talk to you by radio, and tell you your exact position in relation to a predestined glide-path."

"I see," said Mrs. Brangwyn absently.

Lambert nodded.

"You've already been picked up by ground radar. . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"Then it goes something like this . . . slightly left; very slightly left of centre line; on the centre line; on the centre. . . ."

"I see," said Mrs. Brangwyn. "I understand. Thank you very much. Can you stop those people?"

The students were now singing *"La Seine"* at the top of their voices.

"See if you can do something," said Mrs. Brangwyn. Her voice was a dismissal.

The officer and Lambert moved towards the lounge together.

"What's going on?" Lambert asked the officer.

"Nothing special," said the officer. "We're having some trouble getting the Foreign Secretary's plane in."

"The Foreign Secretary's plane . . . ?"

"Yes. They've had to turn back. Trouble with an engine—possibly two. We've just had a message—George Willy

Fox returning. Port engine out."

"Is it serious?"

The duty officer hesitated.

"It isn't, but you can't tell."

"What about the radar thing you've been talking about?"

"That's how we're bringing her in. But they've overshot once. . . . I don't think we can stop those people singing."

"No."

"Better not tell Mrs. Brangwyn . . . she looks a bit overwrought."

"No, of course not. . . . I'll go and sit with her."

Lambert returned to the lounge where Mrs. Brangwyn was peering into the darkness over a hedge of artificial foliage.

"Well?" she asked.

"Nothing very much," he answered. "They're bringing a few planes in. I wonder, Mary, if you'd like me to take you back to town."

"No, thanks," she said. "I'm all right." She had returned to the table and was folding menu cards into triangles and pyramids.

"It's just that one feels so shut in here. Don't you think so? With this fog. And all these frightful flowers. I don't know why they do it, Martin. It makes me feel that I'm in a crematorium. I expect the organ to begin to play at any moment. Have you ever been in a crematorium?" Before he could answer, she continued. "It's horrid—so mechanical and press-button. . . ."

"Let's have a drink, Mary," Lambert said. "Come on. Whisky or Martini?"

He waited for her decision, but instead she pointed a finger to the ceiling and said:

"No, listen."

They both looked upwards, attentive to the mutter of an

aeroplane that grew steadily as the singing in the next room dribbled to an exhausted end. And as they waited, the sound seemed to become an evenly spaced cadence, declining and contented.

"It's coming in," said Lambert.

Mrs. Brangwyn smiled, a delivered smile.

"Oh," she said. "I was so frightened."

Her upper lip glistened where the light fell on her tilted face.

But suddenly, the dying murmur of the engines changed into a great roar that made all the windowpanes of the lounge rattle, as the aircraft soared from ground level into snarling reluctant flight.

Lambert left her and hurried through the private door to the runways. Two powerful fog lamps glared in his face, and he heard the trill of a bell.

"This way, mate," someone shouted, and the ambulance slowly veered away from the entrance to the passenger hall.

"What's happening?" he asked an officer who appeared through the mist. His face became clear for a second in the diffused glow from the lounge; it was pallid and a trickle of sweat ran along the side of his check. "What's going on?" Lambert repeated, but the officer didn't answer and disappeared in the direction of the administrative headquarters.

With his hands in his coat pockets, Lambert walked towards the runway, not far from which he could hear voices in the darkness, and see the lights of vehicles. He stopped at a fire-engine and its crew who were standing by.

"What's happening?" he asked. No one answered.

The duty officer came and stood at his side.

"They'll take her over to Epsom, and back. Or maybe they'll make a narrow turn if they pick her up. It's all under control."

Lambert waited in the fringe of light from the lounge. He didn't want to return till the aircraft had landed. After ten minutes, he heard the sounds of engines. Muffled by the fog, they seemed to alternate from north and south, coughing and angry, then changing in tone, drooping and drooping, till the lights came in swelling over the far-off, invisible hedges.

"It's O.K.," said a fireman.

"Nicely, nicely," said an airfield official. "Very nice indeed."

They heard the aircraft touch down about three hundred yards away with a gentle thump.

"She's done it," said the fireman.

Within a second the thump changed into a howl, a prolonged scream as if the propellers were being dragged along the concrete. The plane rose with its engines revving, agonising to become airborne, then crashed, its lights extinguished, in a long trailing skid beyond their sight.

As Lambert stared into the darkness, silent with the others, a flame like the first, joyful signal of a bonfire rose from the periphery of the airfield. Blazing in a brief illumination, it died, then flared again in a tall column that lit the fog-clouds with gigantic, turbulent reflections, purple and red and yellow. But even while the ambulances and fire-engine with bells ringing began to edge their way through the swaddling fog the fires began to fall into little flames, designing the shape of the aircraft like fairy lamps. Lambert started to follow the red light from the rear of a fire-engine.

"They've bought it," he heard a voice, thick and shocked, through the darkness. "All of them. The whole lot. They've bought it. They've bought it."

Lambert stopped, and ran towards the buildings where an officer was ordering the passengers who had crowded to

the doors to remain inside. "Where's Mrs. Brangwyn?" he asked.

"Who are you?" asked the officer.

"Her brother."

The officer jerked his head towards the small lounge. "She's in there. They're looking after her."

Lambert knocked at the door, and went in. A receptionist was sitting at Mrs. Brangwyn's side, and holding her wrists.

"Martin," the Foreign Secretary's wife cried out when she saw him, her voice rising to a distraught shriek. "The aspirins! Oh—my poor darling—I didn't give him the aspirins!"

IV

UNDER THE WHEELS, the ground crackled with frost as Lambert drove his car past the postern-light that had guided him for the last two miles through the countryside towards the Priory. Valerie opened the door, and ran into the drive to greet him.

"How are you?" she asked. "I was getting so worried."

Lambert noticed that she was wearing a white blouse and a black taffeta skirt, and said, "Go in, quickly. It's freezing."

She laughed, and answered, "You still treat me like a little girl. Have you eaten?"

He hesitated, and she said, "Of course, you haven't. Do come in. Daddy's gone to bed. You know his heart misbehaves sometimes."

"I didn't know," said Lambert, following her into the library. The fire, heavily stoked, and the table-lamps blazing into his eyes after the long drive made him dizzy, and he sat in one of the tapestried arm-chairs.

"I hope it's nothing serious," he said.

"Oh, no," said Valerie, casually. "Just old age."

Her face was indifferent as she went to the side-table where she had prepared for him a tray of chicken and salad.

"Daddy asked me to leave out the whisky and soda for you."

"That was kind of him—he's very thoughtful."

"But I wanted to feed you myself."

After serving him, she sat on a cushion with her arms clasped around the neck of a red setter that sprawled across her lap. She laid her face against the dog's ear, and said, "I almost gave you up at twelve."

"You see, I had to go back to London first—with Mary . . . Mrs. Brangwyn. . . ."

"I'm so sorry. It must have been quite horrible. . . . Please have some more of this chicken."

Remote from her experience. Twenty-two dead. Have another drum-stick.

"No one can feel everything," said Lambert aloud.

"What did you say?" Valerie asked, bringing him a platter of cheese.

"I was rambling," said Lambert.

"No," she said. "Tell me what you were thinking."

"I was thinking," said Lambert, "that you can read in the papers of twenty thousand drowned in China—eighty-three killed in a train disaster in Mozambique—hundreds dying of cholera in Madras. If you apply your mind to it, you'll feel sorry—sympathetic. But if someone you love breaks a leg, you'll know the difference."

"Yes," said Valerie. "Do you know, it seems so obvious, but I'd never thought of it before."

"It was like that during the war," Lambert continued. "You weren't nearly as worried about who was going to win as with whether you were going to get a letter from home—what the people you liked were doing—whether they were having a good time—whether they remembered you—all much more immediate and important than a major battle ten miles away."

"Did you hate the war?" Valerie asked.

"No," said Lambert. "No. I didn't hate it. That's just it.

I was only in it for three years—eighteen months in Italy. But when I think back to those years—even with all the pangs of being away—I don't think I've ever been quite as happy. It had an easy predestination. You were there—and that was the end of it. Nothing to be done about it except relax and go with the others."

"And when you came home?"

He didn't answer, and she came and sat at the foot of his arm-chair. The red setter, neglected, wandered idly round the room till at last it stretched itself in front of the fire.

"Tell me," she said, "what did you feel this afternoon? The nine o'clock news was so cold and antiseptic. Was it absolutely dreadful?"

"Yes. It was dreadful. Absolutely horrifying."

"But was it—was it like twenty thousand Chinese or was it personal?"

The puckered forehead and her watchful, apologetic eyes contradicted the probing insensitivity of her question.

"It was personal," he said.

"You're angry with me," she replied.

"No, not a bit, Valerie. You were perfectly right to ask."

"I only wanted to know," she said, "because I didn't want to think of you being miserable and unhappy."

"I see," said Lambert. And touched her lightly on the cheek.

"Still up! Still up!" said Fergusson, who had quietly entered the room. He was wearing a wine-coloured dressing gown and blue silk pyjamas. "Or should I say 'Still down!' " he went on. "At your age, Valerie, I was always in bed by midnight. And here you are, gorging yourself at twenty to one. I'll have a whisky and soda."

"Dr. Wilson . . ." Valerie began.

". . . is incompetent," her father went on. "I'm feeling

splendid, and a whisky and soda will make me even better. To think, Martin, that I should have spawned a teetotal generation."

He threw a small log on the fire and settled himself in the arm-chair facing Lambert.

"I'm sorry about this afternoon, Martin."

"Yes."

"What are they going to do at the F.O.?"

"I don't know. I haven't heard anything."

They sat silent for a few moments till Fergusson said in his slow, hesitant voice, "The B.B.C. said there was one survivor."

"Padley—it's quite hopeless. He was unconscious when I left the hospital. He's got a fractured skull and burns. He's dying."

"Pity," said Fergusson. "Great pity. He was excellent, I always thought. And now they've made that pipsqueak Baggott Acting Permanent Under-Secretary. Can you imagine it? Baggott!"

Lambert looked up quickly.

"How do you know all this?"

"The wireless, my dear boy. Extraordinary invention! But Baggott—that tuft-hunter. . . . I'm sorry, Martin. I'm afraid I've put my foot in it again. The trouble with you is that you're so loyal to your acquaintances. Perhaps he's an old friend of yours?"

"No, indeed not. Baggott's an old enemy of mine. He once tried to push me out of the Foreign Service. Padley stopped him."

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Fergusson. "As long as you stick to the book and only tread on the faces below you, you can be sure of a dazzling career. Actually, I've decided to devote my decline to a study of orthodoxy in politics."

"How much have you written?" Lambert asked.

"So far, only the title which I like very much: 'Orthodoxy, Paradox and Heresy.'"

On the other side of Lambert, Valerie altered the position of her cushion and leaned her face against the arm of his chair, while he himself lay back in weariness, listening to Fergusson's ponderous description of his book. Between the curtains was the clear night sky and the hard starlight. Impossible even to visualise the fog that earlier that evening an east wind had blown away. In this safe room, with its comfortable voices, Lambert was far from the airfield and its silences. The silence after the aeroplane crashed. The silence of the passengers when the first ambulance drove back. The silence when he himself left with his half-sister. The silence offensively broken by the hiccuping sobs of a woman onlooker.

Now it was all over. And all that remained was weariness; neither shock, nor horror, nor even grief. Tomorrow he would think of Padley. Tomorrow he would remember and mourn him. And Brangwyn. Tomorrow. Brangwyn—heavy, finger-pointing, oppressive. That was all over. Brangwyn no longer weighed on his spirit. There was no purpose in pretending. He felt relief.

"I begin with the paradox—" said Fergusson, "a paradox in an age that reserves its admiration for the nonconformist —that the heretic isn't always right. In fact, my theme is that today's heretic may well be tomorrow's fathead."

"I'll give you four examples of yesterday's heresies that are today's orthodoxies," said Lambert in order to assure Fergusson of his interest. Wondering how soon he could politely go to bed, he lay back again in his chair, with his arms drooping at the side.

"Tell me one—a heresy of faith," said Fergusson.

"Very well—a classic example—the possibility of the antipodes . . ."

"I'm not concerned with that," said Fergusson. "I'm thinking of the Nestorians, the Monophysites, and the Monomelites. What's happened to them? They've gone—all of them—defeated by the stream of an irresistible orthodoxy. There's no sign in religious belief that the antithesis produces a synthesis. A heresy inside a faith must either destroy it or die itself. That's the weakness of Hegel. He never could understand the true nature and strength of orthodoxy. He mixed it up with a bogus conformity. He's the chief corrupter of Europe."

Valerie shut her eyes as her father's voice grew more wakeful.

"But orthodoxy," said Lambert, "is merely a stage in a developing process. There's never been a system of dogma that you can't trace historically to some heresy. Orthodoxy is merely the point where the system temporarily freezes."

He altered his position, and his hand touched Valerie's fingers at the far side of the chair. She made no motion, her head lay drowsily on the padded tapestry, and Lambert looked quickly down at her fair hair opening slightly at the nape of her neck. The tips of his fingers touched the crook of her forefinger, but she didn't withdraw her hand.

"That's a bad metaphor," said Fergusson. "Orthodoxy isn't static—it isn't frozen. It's more like a main stream—moving in a determined direction. The heresy is the deviation, the self-indulgent—the private departure. I give nothing for your rebels."

Lambert extended his finger, and he felt Valerie's hand open and close around it, tentatively at first, then firmly and in assurance.

"You agree with Brangwyn?"

"With Brangwyn—with Brangwyn," Fergusson said

thoughtfully. "No. Brangwyn was never a genuine conservative. The orthodoxy of British conservatism comes from Greece and Rome and Nazareth. Brangwyn was a heretic. He despised the Mediterranean, and fiddled with the German philosophers."

Their hands moved like a conversation. He opened her fingers till her palm was wide and moist, and enfolded them, with his palm pressed against hers, in his own. Their fingers withdrew, explored each other lightly, and returned in a clasp, firm and tense.

"I'm sorry about Brangwyn," said Fergusson. "I wish, though, he could have left more quietly. Mind you, he's had one bit of luck."

"What's that?" asked Lambert.

"He won't have to explain away the leakage."

"No."

"There's no point in shooting a dead duck."

Lambert looked at Fergusson with distaste. From the neck of his dressing gown sprouted a tuft of white hair, and Lambert's glance fastened on it with revulsion.

"I imagine the whole thing's over now."

"Very likely!" said Fergusson. "You never can tell though how the P.M. will deal with a thing like this. . . ."

"Why the P.M.?"

"Well, I assume he'll look after the Foreign Office till there's a new appointment. It's traditional. And besides, he's got every reason to do so."

"You mean Brandon and Macpherson?"

"That's one reason. It's always a grevious problem when you have two Ministers—both putative Foreign Secretaries—who think they ought to be marked up to Number Two. . . ."

"I'd be delighted," said Lambert, "if the P.M. took over the F.O. and kept it."

"I'm not so sure," said Fergusson. "Prime Ministers usually make bad Foreign Secretaries. Anyhow, I'm tired of diplomacy by inspiration. Brangwyn gave us too much of it. And if now it's going to be festooned with the P.M.'s dramatics!"

He waved his hands in deprecation and looked down at his daughter. "Poor Valerie! Fast asleep. Fast asleep. These young people . . ."

Behind the screen of the arm-chair she had taken Lambert's hand in hers, held it for a second with an access of pressure against her blouse, and then released it.

Fergusson tinkled his glass against the siphon, and Valerie raised her face, one side of it flushed, the other pale, and blinked at her father.

"Come on, Valerie," he said. "Time for bed."

In his familiarly brusque manner, he rose, wound the clock on the chimney-piece, and said, "Night!" to Lambert who had risen as well.

When Fergusson had gone, Lambert walked to the table by the chair and took a cigarette. Valerie still sat on the cushion near the fire, without looking at him.

"I think I'd better be getting to bed," said Lambert. Then he went over to her and helped her to her feet. She stood in front of him without speaking, and without meeting his eyes. He put his hand on the side of her hair and raised her face. She looked at his eyes, and away again.

"Shall we go for a long walk tomorrow?" he asked.

"That would be very nice," she answered.

They heard the returning footsteps of her father, and drew apart from each other. Fergusson pushed the door open, and Lambert leaned against the fireplace.

"Why don't you go to bed, Valerie?" Fergusson asked sharply.

The dog, sleepily stirring its tail, came and licked his

ankles, but Fergusson kneed it aside. "Off you go, Fausto," he said, and the setter, intimidated by the jussive tone, trotted lugubriously through the open door.

"Well, Valerie?"

"I was just going, Father," she answered. "I was going to turn off the lights."

"I'll do that," said Fergusson. Like a horse changing foot in mid-trot, he hesitated, and changed his tone. "Oh, Martin, I forgot to tell you: there was a call for you this evening from somebody called Barraclough."

"Barraclough?"

"Yes, Colonel Barraclough. He wanted you to ring him tomorrow morning at the War Office."

"Barraclough!" Lambert repeated. "Don't know him."

They both watched Valerie as she turned off the switches by the door, leaving the room in shadow except for a wreath of light from a table-lamp between the two men.

"Good-night," she said. "And don't settle down again, Daddy."

When she had closed the door behind her, Fergusson said to Lambert, "She's a nice child."

"Very," said Lambert. "Very nice."

"But I'm worried about her—doesn't make any friends. You see, I've rather discouraged the local stockbrokery."

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Lambert. "After all, she's going to Oxford next year. She'll have dozens of friends."

"She's very retiring, you know. Very timid. I wanted her to go up this year," Fergusson spoke the words as if they were a defiance, and added, "She insisted on spending it here."

"It won't harm her," said Lambert. "She'll probably do a lot of reading—and I suppose she knows at least some of your neighbours."

"I don't like them."

Lambert laughed. "Well," he said, "you probably have friends down from London."

"I haven't any friends in London. None that I've kept. Ask me about my acquaintances on the Costa Brava—in Famagusta—Rabat—Corinth—I'll give you a list as long as your arm. . . . London's different. I can't think of six people in London whom I'd want to ask to dinner."

Lambert, who had begun to laugh again, stopped as he saw that Fergusson's expression had fallen into a fold of solemnity.

"I'm very worried about Valerie," said Fergusson. He stubbed an ember back onto the fire with his slipper. "It's difficult for her without her mother. And it's very lonely for her here. You can understand it—can't you, Martin?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "But it's only temporary. In a year or two—you'll scarcely recognise her, just as I find it hard to see in her the schoolgirl I met only two or three years ago."

"I was wondering," said Fergusson. "Advise me—I was wondering if I shouldn't send her for six months to France. Do you know some good family—not in Paris—I think somewhere in the provinces—not in the South—in Bordeaux or somewhere like that?"

"I don't know offhand," said Lambert. "But I'll have a word next week with someone in the Department who deals with France."

"What perplexities!" said Fergusson, stretching himself. "It's bad enough to be an only child! But to be an only parent!"

"Have you thought of marrying again?" asked Lambert.

"Yes," said Fergusson. "I am old, ugly and of limited means. The desperate woman who might want to marry me is quite definitely not the woman I would want to marry myself. Besides, all that is nothing to me any more. I've escaped from the beast. All that concerns me now is Valerie. She is the last and best thing I have."

In the blackness of an unfamiliar room, Lambert awoke a few hours later and began to grope, panic-stricken, for the electric switch. A nightmare, shapeless and oppressive, had wrenched him, with his heart toiling, from a restless sleep. He felt for the light along the cold painted surface of the wall, and failing, subsided for a moment into a half-dream of a place that had walls and no door; and then, awake, he lay panting in the dark, his chest and back trickling with sweat. Like the frame of a silver-grey aquarelle, the window, with its drawn curtains, exposed in front of him the sky lightened by the rising moon behind the house. He listened to the tolling, the dull, steady thud of his heart-beat in his ear, till the window, now clearly defined, became precise and led his thought from the dream into waking.

He awoke with the name "Barraclough" in his mind. Barraclough. Barraclough. The name had a rhythm like his heart-beat.

A Elsa, chaque battement de mon coeur.

To Eleanore, each beat of my heart. He had sent her a book of poems from Italy in 1944. Each heart-beat. And, years later in France, he had found it abandoned under a pile of magazines—*Elle, Lui et Moi, Nous Deux*—that was the sort of magazine she liked.

He resolved not to think of Barraclough—not of Barraclough nor of the airport nor of the fire and the stench of burning petrol, mingled with fog, that persisted like a contamination in his nostrils.

Valerie was somewhere in the house, young and asleep. And Fergusson, watchful and disappointed, in his large and comfortless bed, would rise tomorrow with his burden of grievance and pessimism and defeat.

Lambert turned his pillow over, and remembered Valerie's hand, warm and articulate in his, a confidence, a secret communication. A secret communication.

He switched on his bedside lamp. Now he knew who

Barraclough was. He had met him three months ago on a Foreign Office committee which had been attended by representatives of the War Office. A picture of the oval table had come into his brain with Barraclough sitting at the far end near the door next to Gorse-Jones. He had only spoken two words. Brangwyn had asked if the Conference arrangements had been cleared with War Office Security. And Barraclough had answered, "Yes, sir."

Barraclough. Colonel Barraclough.

Lambert got out of bed, put on his slippers and a dressing-gown, and lit a cigarette. Obviously there would be questions in the House about it, and the Prime Minister would have to answer. The Department would normally have dealt with the P.Q.; normally, Padley would have drafted the reply. With Brangwyn. But this wasn't merely a departmental matter. It was a leak. A British Cabinet paper had been published in the French press. It was strange—very strange—that he himself already knew everything that the Prime Minister and the War Office—Barraclough—would now seek by every means of inquiry to discover, and yet he felt as if he were a stranger to it all, an observer of incidents in which he had no part, remembering those who acted in them as if they were characters in a play that has ended its run. The thought of meeting Barraclough gave him a vague uneasiness. Repudiated, it returned, insistently, till he decided that he would telephone him immediately after breakfast. He would listen to what he had to say. Then he would know how much to tell him. He would say nothing about the meeting with Brangwyn and Padley at the Foreign Office. That was the understanding. Nothing about Augier. Nothing. He'd given his word to Brangwyn. And Brangwyn was dead. And to Padley. And Padley was dying. The dead and the dying. No one knew about it but himself. No one, anywhere.

The sweat between his shoulder-blades had dried, and tranquilly he finished his cigarette, turned off the light and went back to bed. Lying in the darkness he thought of Barraclough and the Brangwyn Report. There was no getting away from it—to deliver a Foreign Office paper to a foreign country—even to an ally—was treason, a betrayal. Curious. He had been asked, by Brangwyn, as a patriotic duty to perform an act of treason. And he had done it. Like a spy. With the tricks and furtiveness of a spy.

Now Brangwyn was dead. And Padley was dying. No one now could tell how he had come to give a departmental report to a French newspaper. None except himself. That was all there was to it.

And if Barraclough questioned him, he would say he knew nothing. Barraclough could go and ask Brangwyn or Padley. They were the only two, apart from himself, who knew everything. The only two who could vouch for him; the only two who could exculpate him. The dead and the dying.

Lambert moved his hand to switch on the light, but instead lay back and thought of Brangwyn and Padley. They were the only two who could vouch for him; the only two who could exculpate him; the only two who knew why he had given the report to *Le Monde Populaire*. The dead and the dying.

V

"Is it possible," Valerie wrote in her diary—a thick exercise book with stiff, black covers rubbed by nearly a year's daily handling—"Is it possible," she began, remembering the garden in summer, the sprig of wistaria plucked from the bush and above all the warm dry hand, enclosing hers and making it secure—the autumn sun that yellowed the fields and striped the woods a reddish brown shone through the small square panes of her window with a faint warmth on her forehead. "Is it possible to love someone"—she wrote and calculated and shrank from the statistic—"several years older than oneself?"

It was very puzzling. Her father, exhausted by a night of insomnia because she had forgotten to collect his sleeping pills from Dr. Wilson the day before, had decided to stay in bed, and she had walked with Lambert for two hours along the canal path and through Deason's Wood to Merchison. All the time he had talked to her about Trollope's novels, her school and whether a history or classics degree was more useful for practical purposes. But nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing about what had happened. It was as if he hadn't noticed, or had forgotten, that she had sat at his side and that he had taken her hand and she his; as if their palms had never clasped each other in the slow rotation that sent a poignant, secret pleasure into her breasts and through all her body.

She put down her pen, and lay on the chintz-covered bed with her face in the pillow to recall it. The pleasure was strange and private, and welled and descended. She shut her eyes and clasped and unclasped her hands, thinking of his fingers enfolding hers with their dry warmth and strength.

After he gave her the wistaria, she had thought of their walk in the garden for many months, asking herself constantly why he had given it to her. The question used to come into her mind at all sorts of odd times. During prep. In the Coffee Club when everybody was babbling away and she was sitting apart from the others in the chair by the door, and, unexpectedly, Miss Fretts had asked in her contralto voice, "Worried about your Scarlatti?" because she was due to play a sonata in the school concert, but actually, she was thinking of the wistaria and of Lambert—a sensation, rather than a thought—and she said, "Yes—no," and everyone stopped talking and laughed. And sometimes after dinner when her father had fallen into one of his morose silences. But it was best of all at night before she fell asleep. Then, flat on her stomach, she would go over the events of that afternoon in their sequence, always starting with the surprising moment when he asked her to walk in the garden.

When she saw his name in newspapers or when she heard her father mention it in passing, trying as she heard it to look casual, it was the image of the walk in the garden that shone on the screen of her mind and his farewell smile that touched her throat.

She had gone back to her room, and watched his car turn below the hill onto the road. And afterwards she had sat weeping for half an hour in front of the looking-glass till her face was blotched and red, and her nose swollen with a catarrhal flow so that her father made her go to bed as she had a cold.

But the memory of his hands was a different memory, not in her eyes, nor in her brain nor her throat. It was in the dark of her pillow where there was no thought, no faces, no people, no places; unrelated to time or incident; the memory of the mysterious convulsions of their hands stirred in her breasts and thighs as they pressed against the bed, a pleasure that grew and trembled and made her want to burst into tears and dissolve in the secure darkness.

Valerie turned the pillow over to cool her face, and then raised herself to examine her appearance in the mirror.

Horrible!" she said aloud, dabbed her cheeks with a powder-puff so that white dust lay over the persistent flush, and hurried down the staircase to where Lambert was awaiting her.

"Would you like to climb up to Gavin's Leap?" she asked him. "It's about four hundred feet. We could easily get up and back before dark—if you're not too tired—and if you don't mind climbing."

"I'm not too tired, and I'm an excellent climber," he answered stiffly. "I climbed the Mottarone last summer."

"There," Valerie said, "I've hurt your feelings. I'm so sorry. Where is the Mottarone? I'm terribly ignorant."

"In Italy. I spent a week there before I went on to Cavalaire."

"How wonderful to travel," she said, guiding him to the footpath that led to the hill. "I've always longed to go to Italy."

"I thought you liked it here."

"I do. But I want to go away all the same. You don't know what it's like to hear a name like—like . . ."

"Like Perugia . . ."

"Yes, Perugia. It's like hearing an orchestra warming up. You hear all sorts of tiny little ripples and squiggles going up and down you. But you couldn't possibly understand.

You're always travelling to somewhere wonderful. It's commonplace for you. Does Eleanore like travelling?"

"She used to. She doesn't much now."

"Did she climb with you?"

"No. She stayed in Cavalaire—she had lots of friends there—and she's keen on swimming."

"Oh, but I like swimming too . . . I'd never have let you go climbing without me."

Careless and energetic, she was walking slightly ahead of him with her hair blowing in the afternoon breeze.

"I adore climbing," she went on. "Whenever I see monuments and churches and mountains, I always want to climb to the top of them."

"What a singular passion!" said Lambert.

"Is it?" she asked. "It seems terribly normal to me. I just want to look down on miles and miles of countryside and clasp it. Has Eleanore ever climbed?"

"Yes. . . . She used to like it. We climbed a bit in America. But when we came back to Europe, she became interested in other things."

"I see," said Valerie, and they walked through the birchwood at the bottom of the hill in silence.

But in his mind as they walked was the memory of the early afternoon in the summer when he returned from Italy, driving in low gear up the steep dusty road that led from the Route Nationale to the hotel. Eleanore heard the car from the window and came to meet him.

"Hello, darling," she said. "Did you have a lovely time?"

"Yes," he answered. "I missed you."

She was standing under the bougainvillaea by the flight of steps, her skin browner against the primrose jacket than when he had left.

"How have you been?" he asked, taking her arm.

"Good!" she answered.

"How good?"

"Very good. I lay on the beach and sunbathed—bathed a few times—and waited for you to come back. It's been madly hot."

She took his arm, and they walked together in rhythm, their sandals clacking on the stone stairs to their bedroom.

He kissed her neck and said, "Come and talk to me while I have a shower."

"No, darling," she said. "I like talking to you from here."

She took off her bolero jacket and skirt and lay on the bed with her legs crossed and propped herself against the pillows.

"Did you see any of the crowd from the Aïoli?" he asked through the hiss of the shower.

"They came over once or twice," she answered. "Benghi and Simon—the Courcins—the two French girls—Marjorie and that frightful husband of hers. . . . But it's been so sweltering. Much too hot to move."

She was fanning herself with a copy of *Le Provençal.*

"How nice and brown you look," she said when he came into the room with a towel over his shoulders. "And so cool! You haven't dried your back. . . ."

"Did you go over there too?" he asked, sitting on the bed.

As she dried his shoulders, he looked over the cork trees to the sea, glittering in the afternoon sunlight. In the shade of a tamarisk, a nursemaid by the side of a sleeping child was languidly knitting; but otherwise, the hotel and the terraces and the serpentine road to the sea were drowsy, as if a huge bee were mumbling a subdued accompaniment to the interminable chirp of the cicadas.

"I'm so glad you're back," said Eleanore. "So glad, Martin. I get frightened when you're away. . . ."

"Frightened of what?"

She had stopped drying his shoulders, and passed her fingers around his waist and pressed her face into his back.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm just frightened. I want you to come back, and reassure me."

He twisted around and watched her face, timid and expectant, and kissed her soft, absorbing mouth that opened and enclosed his.

"I love you very much," she said. "Lock the door, Martin. The chambermaid does the room in the afternoon."

Her eyes were wide and alert, watching him, and he drew away from her.

"Don't look at me like that," she said. "Come back, my darling."

He pressed the latch of the door, and when he returned to her, she drew him above her, her arms clasped around his shoulders, her eyes shut tightly with a small intense frown between them.

Afterwards, they had dressed, and driven to the beach for a bathe. André Courcin, an industrialist, and his wife, Solange, whom he had known when he worked in Paris, the American honeymoon couple who had the next umbrella, and Lindfors, the economist from Geneva, were already there. They greeted Lambert clamorously, and towards five o'clock, Courcin suggested that they might take pedal-boats a few hundred yards out and swim underwater.

"Not for me, dear," said Madame Courcin. "I will walk along the beach with Mitou."

She assembled her beach-bag, the Balenciaga cape that went with her check costume, her medallion necklace, her two bracelets and Mitou, the dog, who in a spatter of sand struggled to escape from her grip. Once Madame Courcin's hands were fully occupied, she decided to wear her straw sunhat. The men stood around, offering gestures of help,

declined by Madame Courcin in a recitative of her intentions. At last, she shook hands with everyone, put on her hat, slipped the lead on Mitou's collar and, with pauses and exhortations to the reluctant dog that reached them long after she had disappeared behind the coloured umbrellas, began her promenade.

"She's gone," said Courcin. "Now we can have sport."

He was a tall, sunburnt man in early middle-age, powerful, abrupt and imperative. He rarely spoke to his wife, and when she said anything with which he disagreed, would laugh quietly to himself, a domesticated laugh that sometimes escaped through his teeth.

"Come on, Lambert," he said. "You and I will pedal. Madame Lambert will sit in the back. And we'll take it in turn to watch the boat."

"Oh, no," said Eleanore. "I'm much too tired. You two go."

"Impossible," said Courcin in his loud, gusty voice. "It is essential for one to guard the boat."

"You go, Per," Eleanore said to Lindfors.

He picked up a handful of sand, and let it dribble between his fingers. "I wouldn't dream of usurping your place," he said.

"What about you, Marian?" she said to the American girl who lay holding her husband's hand.

"Sorry," she said lazily. "I only pedal with my husband."

"Come on, Eleanore," said Lambert. "Courcin can hold the boat while we swim."

The others watched the three of them walk to the pedalboat, and Lindfors said, "She's a very beautiful woman."

"Lovely!" said the American. And his wife flung his hand aside and turned her back.

Paddling the boat as it rose and fell lightly on the waves

at the horn of the bay, Lambert listened contentedly to the hum of voices from the beach, broken sometimes by the screams from the raft nearly fifty yards away where the bathers clustered till it toppled in a half-swoon. The sun lay with a steady warmth on his back and diamonded the sea all around with its fragmented light. Eleanore swam idly around the pedal-boat, turning from time to time to drift with her face to the sun, while Courcin, be-goggled and wearing a breathing apparatus, kept disappearing in prolonged, submarine journeys from which he emerged at last, panting and mysterious.

"Come, Eleanore," he said as they both clung to the boat. "Put on your goggles, and I'll show you a forest of algae."

"No, thank you," she answered. "I'm going to sunbathe."

"Oh, please," he persuaded her. "A short journey—you'll be surprised. They're pink and purple and dark green. Look down."

Eleanore took the glasses from the float and, after swimming a few strokes, dived with Courcin away from the shore. Lambert waited for them to reappear, and leaned over the side and peered into the clear waters made translucent to their depths by the sunlight. But the water where he looked for Eleanore's white cap was unbroken. After a minute and a half, he dived in, swimming in deeper circles, blinking his eyes into the dagger-like crystals of the waves. He rose again and scanned the water anxiously, looking at the blank horizon and from there to the shouting, indifferent children nearer the shore. In a sudden panic, he dived again.

"Mar-tin!"

He heard Eleanore's voice from the raft, as the water came bubbling over his ears.

"Yoo-hoo!"

She was standing next to Courcin, who, leaning against

the diving board, waved cheerfully towards him. She dived off the side, and swam in a powerful, threshing crawl towards the pedal-boat, while Courcin, in his goggles and breathing apparatus, plunged underwater and only rose with dripping hair when he was close to the float.

"It was wonderful," Eleanore said as Lambert helped her up. "Wonderful!"

Her eyes were lit with radiant achievement as she pulled off her cap.

"We went right down almost to the sea-bed. It's extraordinary what you see there. The colours!"

"I didn't know what had happened to you," said Lambert. "I thought . . ."

"Oh, my darling! I was perfectly all right. It's beautifully clear." She kissed his cheek in excitement. "Let's go to Porquerolles tomorrow. André says it's wonderful swimming underwater by the rocks."

Courcin rolled over in the water in two somersaults, and heaved himself onto the back of the float.

"The best underwater swimming is by the rocks," he said. "The molluscs are very interesting. You two paddle. I'm tired."

"You're lazy," said Eleanore. "That's why you're getting so fat."

"I am not fat," said Courcin, with his arms behind his head. "I am a muscular man—relaxing."

He shut his eyes and sang *"Tiens-toi plus près de moi"* at the top of his voice, as Lambert and Eleanore paddled the boat towards the shore, and Eleanore, holding her husband's naked, sun-warmed arms in hers, said, "Martin, it's been such a wonderful afternoon. Let's always be like this!"

After they had dressed in their beach clothes, Eleanore in her shorts and yellow jacket, they had gone for drinks to the Abri. A waiter rolled back the green-striped awning, and

on the terrace, high above the sea, watching the yachts returning into the small harbour, they drank Cinzano and Pernod, and listened to Courcin's stories of his life in North Africa.

"In the desert," he said, "I could drink anything—anything at all. I could drink water from the wells where the camels had been wallowing. But nothing! I was never ill with fever from drinking. . . ."

He threw his arms around the back of his wrought-iron chair, and said, "I was once bitten by a sand-crab. Nothing!"

His shirt fell open over his dark brown, barrel-shaped chest. "I was lost with prospectors for four days. . . ."

"I know," said Eleanore. "But nothing!"

She was sitting next to Courcin opposite Lambert, and a slow accomplice smile passed between their eyes. She had drunk two glasses of Pernod, but she was quite calm and her look was tranquil.

"All right," said Courcin, addressing himself to Lambert. "I will tell you about the time—"

Lambert put up his hand.

"Tomorrow, André. We've got to get back. We've a long drive."

"Yes," said Eleanore, her elbows on the table, her face gentle with the ease of their companionship.

Lambert had put his jacket on the white gravel underneath his chair, and bent to pick it up. In the moment that he did so, he saw among the sandals beneath the table one of his wife's feet with her incarnadined nails pressed slenderly against the white bar at the base, while her other leg hung dependent over Courcin's knee, their bare thighs mingled, her flesh golden against his black hair.

"We must swim again tomorrow," said Courcin, stretching both arms behind his head. "Tomorrow, Eleanore, I'll take Martin to the submarine caves. Underwater's for mer-

maids, not for women. What do you say, Martin?"

Eleanore opened her mouth to speak, but her glance met her husband's and the expression in her eyes changed.

"I think we'd better go, Eleanore," said Lambert. He put on his jacket, turned away from Courcin, shook hands with the three Frenchmen and Madame Courcin, and walked quickly, with Eleanore hurrying ahead of him, to their car. She got into the driving seat, and reversed angrily into an earthenware pitcher full of geraniums, ignored the monitory shouts of the waiters, and drove off, fast, downhill towards the coastal road.

At the first sharp bend, overhung by rocks, she pressed her brakes hard till they squealed in the skid, eased the pressure as she swung the steering wheel hard to avoid an oncoming Citröen, then accelerated for a hundred yards of straight descent, overtaking a lorry on a curve with the outer wheel grumbling on the edge of the cliff.

"You'll kill yourself," said Lambert.

"I don't care," she answered, urging the car towards the mauve sky and the invisible *corniche* at the foot of the silhouetted hills. Her eyes were staring into the dusk, angry and aggrieved.

"You behaved abominably."

"I did?"

"Yes—you did. You insulted André after he behaved so beautifully towards us."

Lambert didn't answer. His wife was driving now at over sixty miles an hour, and in the night that had suddenly fallen, the headlamps of the cars dipping and surging over the coastal road, wandered in the sky like searchlights.

"It's no good, Eleanore," he said at last. "What—" he stopped with a sense of humiliation, and started again, "What's going on between you and Courcin?"

"You're mad!" she answered. "Mad. Stark staring mad.

Whatever makes you think there's anything between André and me?"

"Do you want to know in detail?"

"Yes." Her mouth was determined, and she accelerated again as he began to speak.

"In that case, I'll tell you."

Anger replaced humiliation. The tangle of flesh twisted in his viscera.

"This afternoon—I thought for a few hours that we could begin again. I thought it when we lay on the bed. . . . I thought it when we were swimming. . . . And I thought it when you smiled to me across the table. I thought it till I picked my coat up from the ground. . . . Oh, what's the use of talking about it. . . ."

"I want you to talk about it. Go on. Say it. . . ."

"You were smiling to me—and all the time . . . you and Courcin . . ."

"You're mad," she replied. "There's never been anything between André and me. Never . . ."

"I saw, myself . . ."

"You saw nothing. . . ."

She pulled the car wildly around a bend and again the speedometer rose towards sixty miles an hour.

Near Agay they reached a long line of cars drawn up silently and patiently in the darkness. Eleanore sounded her horn loudly and impatiently at the vehicles, immobile like a cortège that has paused. After a few minutes, Eleanore swung the car out, and flashing its lights, edged her way, despite the angry complaints of other drivers, in a second file towards a gendarme who was directing the traffic.

"Stop!" he said, waving his torch.

Behind him were three other gendarmes taking measurements in the roadway, watched by silent campers and travellers who had pulled their cars up. In the headlights, a corpse

drained of blood lay in the centre of a great, dark stain.

"Pass," said the gendarme, beckoning her into a narrow lane of traffic that had begun to move.

"Please, Martin—you drive," Eleanore said. "I don't feel well."

He changed places with her and drove with the stream of vehicles till they had spaced themselves out, carefully, watchfully, in the direction of Le Lavandou.

"I think it was a dead cow," Eleanore said.

"Yes," Lambert answered. "It was a dead cow."

The pale corpse in rubber shoes, which had begun the day with hope, lay on a sandy road, naked and peered at by holiday-makers who were hurrying to their dinner. And all its purposes and intentions and projects, started with expectation and love, lay sprawled in its indecent end—the passions and the resentments, the angers and the pleasures, all the day's ambitions concluded in the dusk.

"Oh, Martin," said Eleanore, "why do we quarrel? All the things we quarrel about are so unimportant. . . ."

"But Courcin . . ."

"I hate him."

He drove past the flowering shrubs of Roches Fleuries.

"They're like faces," said Eleanore. "Please, let's be happy, Martin. Please!"

She put her head on his shoulder.

"I love you very much. It was a cow, wasn't it? It looked so white."

Lambert nodded and took her hand. That was their understanding. They both gave each other reassurance in a lie.

"I think," said Valerie, "that there's nothing I'd like to do more than climb a mountain in winter on skis."

"Yes," said Lambert. They walked on without speaking.

"Would you ever lie to someone you loved?" Lambert asked Valerie suddenly.

"Only to someone I loved," Valerie answered. "I couldn't be bothered to lie to anyone else."

The rocks to the summit of the hill jutted from the scrubby grass like stepping stones, and Valerie ran ahead while Lambert, slipping on the wet surface, came more slowly behind.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Lambert. He reached the top and looked down on to the arc of the horizon, stretching in a green-brown panorama of woods, fields, three small lakes and a factory chimney breaking the plain.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Valerie asked. She linked her arm loosely in his, and he watched the delight in her eyes as they travelled over the landscape. At the top of the Leap, she trembled.

"It's getting cold," said Lambert.

"No, it isn't," said Valerie. "I'm not a bit cold."

She drew her arm from his, and smiled to him.

"It's been such a wonderful afternoon," she said.

It's been such a wonderful afternoon. Let's always be like this. He looked down at Valerie's face; and the Abri, the trellis of table-legs, Courcin, and the brakes in the darkness were like the half-forgotten story of someone else's experience.

"Yes, it's been a wonderful afternoon," he answered.

"Would you like to go to a dance in the village tonight?" she asked. "The local association . . ."

"Anything you like. What about your father, though? We can't leave him."

"Oh yes—he wants to stay in bed. Margaret will look after him. He wanted me to take you out. I'm afraid it won't be very exciting. . . ."

"That will be perfect. I couldn't bear an exciting evening."

Lambert took her hand as they walked down the steep, narrow path that descended from the upper rocks.

"Tell me about your plans," Lambert said.

"No," she answered. "I'm always telling you about myself. You never talk to me about yourself or your work. When is Eleanore coming to England."

"I'm not sure," said Lambert. "Not till the spring, at any rate. She doesn't like England in autumn."

"I love England in autumn," said Valerie. "Will you ride with me tomorrow? I love the country in autumn. Love it, love it, love it."

And she ran towards the red setter that bounded up as they approached the house. She held the dog, struggling and barking, with her arms around his thick neck, thrusting her face away from his lapping tongue, and said, "Oh, Fausto, Fausto, I do so love you."

VI

THE MASTER OF ceremonies sprinkled French chalk over the wooden floor, and kicked away a trailing ribbon while the band, Keith Monslow and His Serenaders, resting from the fury of their unco-ordinated samba, wiped their hands with silk handkerchiefs and adjusted the soggy collars of their dress shirts. During the evening, the wooden Institute had developed a hothouse temperature as the dancers arrived in their social times, the farm workers and their girls earliest of all; later, the farmers; then the London commuters, solicitors and stockbrokers; and last of all, a Member of Parliament, Alan Glasson, deputising for the sitting Member who was ill. Glasson had made the journey reluctantly. He stood near the door with Mrs. Royde-Carr, the chairman of the committee, struggling with distaste at the scented and soapy smell of the dancers at rest, and disinclined to challenge the red-faced guffaws of the groups congesting the walls.

"There are no votes in it," he said to himself, and smiled acquiescently to Mrs. Royde-Carr, observing the vein throbbing in her neck as she addressed him inaudibly in the din.

"Oh, lord—a speech!" said Valerie, standing with Lambert in the shadow of a rafter near the bandstand. The drummer caught her eye and bowed to her.

"Who is that?" Lambert asked.

"He drives our tractor and does odd jobs," said Valerie. "He's a Pole."

Lambert glanced with hostility at the tractor-driver-drummer who, finding himself indicated and observed, set his pale, flat face into a curtsy from which it only rose at the instruction of Keith Monslow who commanded a roll of drums and a clash of cymbals to announce the visiting Member of Parliament.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Mrs. Royde-Carr began. Confronted by the faces, some with sagging mouths which drew her attention irresistibly, her mind became blank except for the thought that Edward's lapels were shiny and that Lilian Babcock was staring straight at her. She unfolded her notes, and read her speech hastily.

"I am very sorry to tell you that our Member who had hoped to be with us tonight is ill."

Without pausing for the "Ah!" of sympathy to finish its exhalation, she went on, "But we have here as his deputy his young friend—and ours" (a patter of applause) "Mr. Alan Glasson, Member of Parliament for Merchison North."

"South!" said Glasson, buttoning his jacket and unbuttoning it as he felt its constriction. He was hungry none the less. From the layers of sandwiches at the far table, he realised that the committee intended to give him not dinner but refreshments. At the moment, but for the sitting Member, he might have been dining in London at the Fantasio with the Peripatetics. He threw back his shoulders, chose a woman of benevolent aspect in a suitable middle-distance to receive his message and interpret his audience's mood, and began, self-deprecatingly, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm not really here at all."

The murmur of laughter warmed him, and drew him on.

"Where are you then?" said a belated voice from the back of the hall. The question evoked a laugh from contiguous

sycophants, and Glasson continued:

"I am here to say a few words—not a speech—don't be afraid . . ."

Sympathetic grins.

". . . on behalf of your own Member who is, unfortunately, as you have heard, ill and unable to attend himself. . . ." (Why Hinton hadn't sent them a message and had done with it, heaven only knew. He'd got the Whips to appoint a deputy; and they'd chosen him. Him! Glasson! Not a vote in the place.)

"Yet I can't help feeling that it wouldn't be inappropriate for me to offer you a brief *tour d'horizon* of the political situation. . . ."

A few farmers near the door escaped in a cold draught, but Mrs. Royde-Carr announced sharply, "Shut that door, please," and Glasson, swaying on his heels, relentlessly delivered the speech on the need for incentives and higher productivity which a short-sighted Speaker had denied him the chance of making the previous week.

Like a ship into a rising wind, Glasson forged ahead through the sound of shuffling feet, coughing and mounting conversation, sustained by the energy of the reporter who was taking down his speech. At worst, he felt, it might be good for a paragraph under "Week-End Speeches" in the Sunday press.

"He can't stop," said Valerie. "That's his third peroration. He's like a musical box that stops—and you think it's finished—and then it starts all over again."

But Glasson had been diverted from his theme by the sight of Lambert, whom he had sometimes seen, though this eluded his memory, in the Civil Servants' "Box" at the House of Commons during Foreign Affairs Debates. Glasson ended his speech with his habitual formula: "The future is ours. It belongs to our children. Let us be worthy

of our trust, so that they may one day say, 'We are worthy of our fathers' inheritance.'" What it meant, he didn't quite know. But it was rotund in language, noble in its general trend, and always good for a prolonged applause.

The band began to play a waltz, and the young men lining the wall on its right moved like infantry in loose formation on the girls who stood or sat against the wall on the left. The committee members at the tables waited till the others had begun before they too joined in the dancing. Meanwhile, under the guidance of Mrs. Royde-Carr, Glasson was walking cautiously round the perimeter of the floor, occasionally pausing to shake an appointed hand.

"And this is Valerie—Valerie Fergusson," said Mrs. Royde-Carr. "So pleased you came, Valerie."

"How do you do!" said Glasson. "I always thought I knew all the pretty girls in the neighbourhood."

That was his formula for dances and garden parties. It was certain of success. Valerie smiled with pleasure.

Lambert, unsmiling, said to Glasson, "My name is Lambert."

"Yes," said Glasson. "Thought I knew you. Met you at the F.B.I. Dinner."

"I don't think so," said Lambert.

"Perhaps the Coningsby Club . . ."

"No, I'm at the Foreign Office. We must have seen each other in the House."

"Yes."

Glasson wasn't interested in Civil Servants. He was already stretching his hand out to the beaming, middle-aged woman whom he had used as a range-finder for his voice and expression.

"I heard your speech, sir," she said, rising from her seat to take his hand and then subsiding.

"You mean you suffered it," said Glasson encouragingly.

"Oh, no," she answered. "I listened to every word. It was quite nice."

"Thank you," said Glasson stiffly.

Lambert heard his voice fading with the music, "Thank you. Yes. I haven't dined . . . my train . . ."

"I'm glad he's gone," said Valerie as she and Lambert danced together. "I don't want you to think about anything to do with the Foreign Office and work. You do dance well. Do you dance a great deal at the Foreign Office?"

"I hardly ever go anywhere nowadays where they dance. When I was in Paris and New York, we used to dance a lot. . . ."

"This must be very dull for you—an Institute dance. . . ."

"No, not dull. Not for a moment. And what Glasson said was perfectly true. . . ."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say it but he meant it."

"Meant what?"

"You know exactly. . . ."

"I know, but I want you to say it."

"He meant that you're a very pretty girl. But you're not a very good dancer. You keep kicking me sharply in the ankle."

"I'm so sorry, Martin. Shall we stop?"

"No—I like it very much. Do you often come to these dances?"

"Never. Am I doing it better now?"

"Much."

"I'll improve," Valerie said, "if you don't give me up as hopeless. The trouble is I can waltz this way—but not that way."

"In that case," said Lambert, "we'll waltz this way."

He found a space on the edge of the floor where they turned around and around clockwise to the one-two-three, one-two-three of the Serenaders.

"I do like dancing with you," said Valerie. She gave him a quick, contented glance, and added, "I'm getting giddy. Let's try the other way."

"No, let's sit down," said Lambert. The band had begun to play "The Blue Danube" and the dancers, sweating freely now, had begun an abandoned gyration, colliding and cannoning like dodge-'em cars at a fun-fair. He took Valerie's arm, and led her to their chairs on the other side of the hall.

A young man with thick fair hair came up to her and said, "Good-evening, Valerie. Next dance?"

"Sorry," she said casually. "I'm engaged."

"Well—the next but one."

"Oh—ask me later, Edward. . . ."

The young man reddened, and withdrew awkwardly.

"Who was that?" Lambert asked. "You were very unkind to him."

"That's Edward Whyte-Parker—he's at Magdalene. Terribly tiresome. He's got a thing about me."

"I thought he took it rather bravely."

"Yes . . . he's impervious. Did you mind?"

"Not a bit."

"He's very good-looking though."

Lambert didn't answer.

"Don't you think?" Valerie persisted.

"Rather bloodless," said Lambert. "With that fair hair he looks insipid."

"Yes, he does a bit," Valerie said, and added in excuse, "He's an awfully good dancer."

"How long have you known him?" Lambert asked.

"Ages. About four years. We used to ride together. He's a

year older than me."

"And you—have you a thing about him too?"

"Edward?" she laughed out loud. "You are silly, Martin. He's an absolute . . . an absolute child."

Lambert looked benevolently at Whyte-Parker, who was puffing a cigarette without inhaling, near a wooden pillar.

"He's terribly sweet, though," said Valerie. "He sent me a Donne for Christmas. He's reading English."

"I see," said Lambert. "What's he doing here?"

"Oh, he said he'd be coming to the dance. He wrote and said he hoped to see me."

"Are you very fond of him?"

"Oh, Martin, really—I never give him a thought. Poor Edward!"

Balmed by her assessment of Whyte-Parker, Lambert smiled and asked, "Would you like a coffee, Valerie?"

"No," she answered. "I'd rather have an ice. You stay here, and I'll fight for it at the bar."

Before he could answer, she had begun to run and then, recollecting *Femina's* observation that "the Gay Girls are the girls who take their time," stopped to smooth her blue silk dress and walked at a deliberate pace to the bar and its double row of customers.

Lambert leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. The band, the stir of conversation, the nameless faces, the heavy atmosphere were soporific. And Valerie. His hands retained a memory of her body, young and energetic and vital; and somewhere in his brain was the recollection of her devoted eyes. He tried to think of yesterday and the day before and of the days and weeks to come, of the airport and the Press Room, of his flat, the Memorial Service, the black ties and armbands, of Brangwyn and Padley and Mary, of the newspapers and the general mourning. But the thought of Valerie, her voice, the warmth of her breasts and her shoul-

ders through her silk dress, came back to him in an endless, exclusive recurrence.

"Hello, old chap, having a good time?"

Lambert looked from the grey flannel trousers to the smiling face of the man in front of him.

"I'm sorry . . ." he began.

"Barraclough," the other said. "Remember me? We were on the Portsmouth Committee. . . ."

"Of course," said Lambert, rising. He smiled to Barraclough, and shook hands with him. "Stupid of me! It's just that you're about the last person I'd expect to see at this sort of place."

He paused and added, as Barraclough stood facing him with an air of amusement, "Good lord . . . I forgot to ring you."

"So you did," said Barraclough. "Don't give it a thought. I had to be in Cirencester this afternoon. I rang old Fergusson, and he said I'd find you here. Do you mind if I sit down?"

Lambert saw Valerie's blue dress in the lateral queue at the bar and said, "No. What can I do for you?"

"Sorry to disturb you at your pleasures," said Barraclough. He brushed his moustache with his finger tips, and went on, "I've got to be back by tomorrow."

"I see," said Lambert.

"I'm not really dressed for dancing," said Barraclough. "Grey flannels, tweed jacket . . ."

"It doesn't matter very much here," said Lambert.

"Not really," said Barraclough. "Anyhow, I didn't come here to dance."

Lambert waited for him to continue.

Barraclough sat himself in the chair at Lambert's side and said, "It gets terribly fuggy in these wooden halls. . . .

Shocking about Brangwyn!"

"Very sad!" Lambert answered.

Barraclough, circling warily in the conversation like a boxer, came nearer. "Yes, I've been swanning around for the last two days trying to get something out for the Prime Minister's P.Q.," said Barraclough. "The Opposition's getting all hot and bothered. There are another two questions down for Thursday."

"I'm not very much in the picture," said Lambert. "Is there anything new?"

"Nothing much," said Barraclough, stretching his long legs and crossing his ankles. "The whole business has got a bit complicated. The aircrash—you can never tell with these things. And the French have pulled out of the Rome Conference. . . ."

"When did you hear that?" Lambert asked.

"I heard it in the car on the six o'clock news. Lacache has asked for a vote of confidence. There's a hell of a row going on in France. Sensitive people! *'Le rapport Brangwyn'* and *'L'affaire Brangwyn'*—you can't get away from it in Paris. I was over there the day before yesterday—and you'd almost think . . ."

"What about *Le Monde Populaire?*" Lambert interrupted. "They're the fellows who've been plugging the story."

"They are indeed. They're whooping it up like mad—a stone has been dropped in the puddle and British eyes are still blinded by the mud—*'par les éclaboussures.'* Nice word *'éclaboussures'*—so splashy!"

"And the denials?"

"My dear fellow, have you ever known an official denial that's caught up with a lie? Look at this—yesterday morning's."

He produced from his pocket a folded cutting from *Le*

Monde Populaire, and translated aloud:

" 'The publication by *Le Monde Populaire* of a paper dealing with British policy in Western Europe has produced several official denials as to the authenticity or existence of such a paper.' "

"That's all right," said Lambert.

"Is it?" said Barraclough. He read on: " 'We expected these denials. Obviously in a case like this it couldn't be otherwise. Our readers can rest assured that we've got *sérieuses garanties . . .*' How would you translate that?"

"Proof," said Lambert. "They must have something pretty concrete to be so sure."

" '*Sérieuses garanties,*' " Barraclough repeated. "It sounds to me more like 'reliable witnesses.' You know the editors of *Le Monde Populaire?*"

"I've met them. . . ."

"Rilly, Melancourt, Calopin, Delisle . . . ?"

"I know them all slightly."

"And Augier—Victor Augier—how well do you know him?"

Lambert pushed his hands in his pockets to control their tremor.

"I know him pretty well. He's their very best man, you know. Have you seen him lately?"

"That's exactly what I wanted to ask you," said Barraclough.

"I saw him the other day," said Lambert, "at our press conference." He was watching Barraclough's friendly, unemotional face cautiously.

"What sort of chap was he?" Barraclough asked.

"Very straightforward—accurate—shrewd. How do you mean—'was'?"

"I mean he's gone. That's why I went to Paris. I called on him at Lancaster Gate, but they told me he'd gone. I flew

over to Paris, and went to his office in the Boulevard Haussmann. . . ."

"Well?"

"He'd left—they've posted him to Rabat."

"Rabat!" Lambert repeated, and smiled. Rabat. Rabat was remote, far from inquiry, far from Barraclough, far from the policeman's exhumations.

"He was quick off the mark," he said.

"Yes," said Barraclough. "And the other boys of the paper either know nothing or won't talk. Do you know Verdurin?"

"No."

"I thought you might have. He's Augier's buddy—his 'stringer.' They've shipped him off, too."

"That makes it very awkward."

"Not really," said Barraclough, looking straight at Lambert. "We've got a pretty good line on the whole thing. . . ."

Lambert waited for him to continue, observing with revulsion the thin, close-shaven face.

"Oh, yes," Barraclough went on, laughing in a private satisfaction. "Tell me, old chap. Sparr-Gamby used to work in your Department. Think much of him?"

"Sparr-Gamby? . . . He's in the Western Department. Quiet, retiring man!"

"That's the one. What do you think of him?"

Barraclough waited attentively for the answer.

"I haven't any strong feelings about him," Lambert said with a slight hesitation. "I wouldn't myself want to spend an evening with him. But I don't want to be unfair. He's conscientious—good at his job. You know he was a Scholar of Kings. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I know all that. . . ."

"And I think Baggott was a bit hard on him when all that

stuff blew up about his article."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do. Sparr-Gamby wrote it before he went into the F.O. Once in, he couldn't advertise his renunciation—as the others did."

"Which others?"

"The others who could publish their repentance and sell it."

"I suppose there must be a lot of Sparr-Gambys. . . ."

"Bound to be . . ."

"Yes, bound to be. . . ."

"It's a natural inference. The question is whether they're dangerous or harmless. . . ."

"Yes," said Barraclough reflecting. "Pretty good band, this. Bit too much drums . . ."

"Far too much," said Lambert.

"Shy sort of a chap, I gather," said Barraclough.

"That's why he was moved," said Lambert. "He was pretty hopeless at parties. One of his jobs was entertaining foreign journalists—but he was much too shy."

"Not very good with girls, I'm told. . . ."

"How on earth can anyone know?" Lambert asked. "I'd have thought . . ."

"Oh, you can tell," Barraclough said calmly. "He's very devoted to his mother. I've met her. She lives in Buxton. . . . Do you know when he first met Augier?"

"I've no idea. Probably three years ago when he first came into the Information Department."

"They were pretty close friends. . . ."

"Augier knew a lot of people," said Lambert. "He entertained . . . his flat was always 'open house' for drinks after six o'clock. You might see anyone there—Members of Parliament, Civil Servants, editors, businessmen, ac-

tresses. . . . He must have had an enormous expense account."

"He had private means," said Barraclough. "Did you know that Augier and Sparr-Gamby were together in Stresa two years ago—at the Regina Palazzo?"

"No, I didn't know. . . ."

"Do you recognise any of the people in this photograph?"

Barraclough took a wallet from his breast-pocket and produced a coloured photograph which he handed to Lambert.

"Of course I recognise them," said Lambert. "Augier and Sparr-Gamby."

"That's it," said Barraclough. "We found it at Lancaster Gate. Augier and Sparr-Gamby at Isola Bella with a distant view of Stresa across the lake. Wonderful place—Lago Maggiore! Remember the Stresa Conference? It was my first job abroad—long before the war—you were still at prep school. Wonderful! I used to stand for hours outside the Hotel des Iles Borromées waiting for the Foreign Secretaries to come out, and looking towards the islands. Have you ever noticed how the light seems to suspend the islands between the sky and the lake?"

"What's that?" said Lambert with a start. "I'm sorry. I was thinking of Augier and Sparr-Gamby. . . ."

"Curious association!" said Barraclough.

"Very curious," said Lambert. "But I don't quite see what you're getting at. . . . I knew Augier fairly well. He was always chasing around with women. . . ."

"I'm making no suggestions," said Barraclough. "My job is simply to report facts. And the immediate facts of interest are that Augier and Sparr-Gamby knew each other well—that they went on holiday together—that they stayed in a most expensive hotel. . . . It's interesting. . . . Did

you know any of Sparr-Gamby's other friends?"

Lambert thought for a moment, and said, "No. Strangely enough—I didn't. He was a very shut-in type of person."

"They often are," said Barraclough.

"What do you mean?" Lambert asked.

"I mean that these apparent recluses often have a very full and rich life within their isolation—friends and activities and precious reveries—that's why they are so vulnerable—so very vulnerable to blackmail. Have you ever thought Sparr-Gamby might have been blackmailed?"

"No," Lambert answered curtly. "But how could I possibly tell? Anyone might be blackmailed—even when they are perfectly innocent."

"Yes," said Barraclough, pulling himself up from his lounging position. "I've been talking to Sparr-Gamby, asking him about Augier. It's very hard to probe the truth. Sometimes, when I've been asking people questions, I've had the curious feeling—almost a hallucination—that I would like to lift the top of their heads like a lid and inspect right inside, and discover what they are really thinking. All the rest is guesswork. You follow me, don't you?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "Asking questions is, on the whole, a very crude way of finding out the truth."

The two men rose as Valerie arrived, carrying a cup of coffee in one hand and an ice in the other.

"Quick, take it!" she said to Lambert. "The coffee's slopping and the ice is melting."

"This is Valerie Fergusson—Colonel Barraclough," Lambert said, introducing them.

"Hello!" said Barraclough. "I think we spoke on the telephone. You had the impression that I was called Balaclava."

"I'm frightfully sorry," said Valerie calmly. "I've been

doing the nineteenth century —I'd been reading Guedalla on the Crimean War and you were fresh in my mind."

"You mean my pseudo-homonym," said Barraclough.

"Well, Balaclava of the War Office sounded so right. Are you staying here long?"

"Oh, no. Till tomorrow. I'm at the Crown. . . ."

Valerie looked from him to Lambert and back again, and said, "Why don't you come and see us tomorrow? Daddy would love to meet you. . . ."

"I may have to go to London," said Lambert.

"I'd like to meet your father again," Barraclough said. "I believe I met him at the Sugar Conference in Havana—about five years ago. Would eleven o'clock be all right?"

"Yes," said Valerie, smiling and taking his outstretched hand. "I know he'd be delighted to see you."

"Well, good-bye, old chap," Barraclough said to Lambert. "And thanks for your help."

"I'm afraid I wasn't much help at all."

"Oh, yes. I wanted to fill in a bit more about Sparr-Gamby. I didn't tell you—he had dinner with Augier the day before they published the story!"

"Well?"

"Well—see you tomorrow."

At midnight, after the band had played "God Save the Queen," they walked from the haloing light of the Institute along the frost-hardened, rutted lane that led to the house. Valerie felt her way cautiously in the darkness, behind Lambert who led the way.

"I'm sorry I'm so slow," she said. "I can't see a thing. How idiotic of me not to have brought a torch."

Lambert struck a match, but the wind blew it out almost at once.

"Let me take your arm," he said. "I can see quite well."

He took her arm and enclosed it, through her coat, with his fingers, and began to walk more quickly.

"Is that better?" he asked.

"Yes, it's lovely. It's like running downhill with your eyes shut."

"Tell me, Valerie, why did you invite Barraclough to the house?"

"I don't know—I thought he was a friend of yours—I thought it would please you. . . . Didn't it?"

"Not much. He's a policeman."

"I thought he was at the War Office."

"He is. He's a policeman disguised as a soldier disguised as a civilian. . . ."

"Well—" she asked helplessly, "what's he got to do with you?"

"Nothing—nothing much. He's snooping around trying to find out who gave the French the Brangwyn Report. . . ."

"But that *is* important. Isn't it important, Martin?"

"Yes—it's important."

He released her arm, and she stumbled along at his side.

"Martin!" she said.

"Yes?"

"I didn't tell you how much I enjoyed myself tonight. Thank you very much for taking me. . . ."

"You sound like a very small girl after a party—'thank you for having me.' "

"I didn't mean that at all."

She felt rebuffed and her eyes blurred with tears; she was grateful for the night. She stopped to blow her nose, and heard his voice ahead of her calling out, "Valerie! I've lost you."

He came back, groping towards her in the darkness.

"I'm here!" she answered.

He felt her sleeve, and drew her towards where he stood.

"Let me make sure I don't lose you again!" he said.

He put his arm around her waist and from there, under her left armpit, and they walked together slowly and without speaking towards the light of the postern-gate, while beneath his fingers, he felt her breast, firm and pendant in the rhythm of their motion.

Near the entrance, he paused, and said, "I think I must go to London tomorrow."

"How long for?" she said quickly and anxiously. "You're so restless. You keep going away."

"I'll only be gone for the afternoon."

"You will come back?"

"Yes—of course."

"Martin . . ."

"Yes?"

"You don't really think of me as a schoolgirl, do you? Do you?"

He took his arm from her waist and looked at her face illuminated by the postern-light.

"No. I don't think of you as a schoolgirl. I only wish . . ."

"What do you wish?"

She fumbled with the iron knob of the gate.

He touched her lightly on the cheek without answering, and opened the gate for her to pass.

VII

LAMBERT HURRIED THROUGH the swing-doors of his club, hung his hat and overcoat in the cloakroom and impatiently entered the dining-room where every table was already occupied by members eating in quartets or octets.

"Sorry, sir, full up!" said the waiter.

Lambert pointed to a small isolated table by the window. "What about that?" he asked.

"Reserved!" said the waiter. "But there ought to be something in a few minutes."

Lambert looked at his watch. "I've got to be at the Foreign Office by three," he said.

"You'll be out long before then," said the waiter.

"All right," said Lambert. "I'll come back."

He walked from the dining-room to the gallery that circled the club and, leaning over the balustrade, surveyed first its Byzantine cupola and then the wall of its centre hall surrounded by marble Corinthian columns. The swing-doors moved with a constant thump and revolution as members entered and left, their traffic forwarded by a uniformed attendant.

Lambert ordered a whisky and soda, and recomposed the statement which he had prepared for Baggott.

When he had telephoned the Prime Minister's office the sharp direction of the Private Secretary—"Your proper

course, my dear fellow, is to take it up with Baggott"—had antagonised him, and almost persuaded him to abandon his intention. But Fergusson, who stood at his side when he was telephoning, had said, "No, Martin. Get it over and done with. You're holding a struggling cat on your chest. Get rid of it."

It was what he had said the evening before, when Lambert had told him about Brangwyn and Padley and Augier and the report. Fergusson had listened to him in the library, interposing from time to time a "h'm" of attention. At the end of Lambert's description of what had happened, he said, "It's grotesque. Why in heaven's name did you have anything to do with it? He couldn't have ordered you to. . . ."

"Yes, he could. But it wasn't an order. I wanted to do it."

"Why?"

"Why? It's hard to say. Why does one want to do anything? I thought it would be a good thing to do. . . ."

"Well?"

"It would help me to get posted away from London. That's the whole story. It's been no good for years. You know it—or if you don't know it, you must have guessed it. You know about Eleanore. . . ."

"Not very much. I don't ask you to tell me. . . ."

"There's nothing to tell you except that if we don't make a fresh start—somewhere away from England—not in America or France—there's no hope for our marriage. . . ."

"And what then?"

"I don't know. Last summer in France, she tried to commit suicide. . . . I went into this because I believed Brangwyn promised—that when it was over he'd have me posted abroad—to the Pacific."

"That would have suited him."

"It would have suited him very well. They'd always dis-

liked Eleanore. She used to rattle very faintly in my sister's cupboard, and in Brangwyn's. He would have been glad to get rid of me."

"What about Padley?"

"Padley was a friend of mine. He hated the whole business from the start. But his weakness—his weakness was in a curious way a social one. Brangwyn used to smother him with a sense of social inferiority. As a brain, Padley could make rings around him, but if Brangwyn wanted anything done, he had several generations of authority behind him. And Padley had a bank clerk—deceased!"

"Did anyone else know about this—his secretary? Someone in the Registry must know about the paper. . . ."

"No one knew about it. Not a soul. The typescript was Brangwyn's own copy that should have gone into the Secret Waste. He simply kept it. There's no record or minute of the meeting. Absolutely nothing."

Fergusson rose from his arm-chair, and straightened a photograph of his wife on a side-table.

"It means," he said, "they've left you holding the baby."

Lambert didn't answer.

"No, not a baby," Fergusson went on, "a great, nasty, struggling, clawing cat. You'd better get rid of it, Martin. Ring the P.M. Try and get an interview with him. Get it off your chest! You've been looking ill."

And in his presence the next morning, Lambert had telephoned to the Prime Minister's secretary and afterwards to Baggott's secretary.

"Ryder!" said the voice at the other end of the telephone.

"Ryder? This is Lambert. I'd like to see Baggott for a few minutes this afternoon. It's urgent."

Ryder went away and then came back to the telephone and said, "He's pretty busy today. What about tomorrow week—Monday the fourth."

"I've got to see him today. Tell him it's important—urgent."

Again the pause and the mutter of Ryder speaking into the intercommunicating telephone.

"One moment," said Ryder, returning. "He'll speak to you himself."

"Yes, Lambert?" came the quick, irritable voice.

"I have to see you urgently."

"Won't it keep?"

"No. It's about the Brangwyn Report. I have some important information."

"Three o'clock this afternoon in my office!"

Lambert slowly replaced the receiver.

"Well?" Fergusson asked.

"Three o'clock this afternoon in his office," said Lambert.

"You'd better get a move on," said Fergusson.

Valerie came in carrying a tray of coffee. "Don't go without a cup of coffee," she said.

Lambert looked at her smiling, confident face, and said brusquely, "I think your father will have some. I've got to be off."

"Mustn't drink it," said Fergusson. "All this . . ." indicating the area of his heart.

"Please have a cup," said Valerie. She knelt on the floor by the low mahogany table, and Lambert watched the back of her neck, her bare elbows and the movement of her shoulders as she poured out two cups.

And now, leaning over the balustrade, observing the movement and agitation of the hall below, he remembered Valerie, her name recurring like a whisper in his mind as it had recurred in accompaniment to all that he had thought and done in the last three days.

He asked a waiter to find out about his table, finished his

whisky and ordered another.

Her name, her face, her voice came back to his mind, and he said to himself, "It's absurd!" and rejected the thought and still it returned with the whisper of her name; the texture of her coat, the resilience of her breast against his hand as they walked in the darkness; her neck bending over the coffee-pot; and her hand, warm and devoted and adult, in his. If it were all over, if Eleanore and he remained separate and apart as they had been for many months, if an end could come to their waste of years, if he could dislodge the accumulation of regret and responsibility, he might start again. After he had spoken to Baggott.

Like two pains that fuse in the central nervous system, the recollection of Eleanore at Bandol and of Barraclough, cross-legged and probing, at the Institute dance, merged in a single obsessive anxiety. To be rid of it all, to be whole again with the world, no longer to have a private, secret bass to the treble of every conversation. He had thought that Fergusson would understand, and so he had told him. But even Fergusson with his old, sympathetic eyes had listened to him like a doctor when a patient tells him of his mortal symptoms.

"Get rid of it," Fergusson had said. Get rid of it. Operate. Go and see Baggott. Poor old chap. So glad it's you and not me.

"What about my table?" Lambert asked the waiter.

"About another ten minutes, sir," said the waiter.

Lambert looked at the clock, and decided that he would do without lunch.

"Get me another whisky and soda, will you?" he asked.

He felt calm and clairvoyant. After he had told Baggott about the report, he intended to ask him for a new posting. Baggott wasn't an unfair man. He was merely a tiresome man, a little upstart. On principle he bullied anyone taller

than himself. If they were subordinate. They'd often quarrelled before—on the Information Liaison Committee and about the transfer of Meredew to Lyons. With Padley's backing, Lambert had won each time. About Eleanore, Baggott had been vindictive; his Austrian wife didn't like her. But Padley—good old Padley—had stopped all that.

Lambert put down his glass and shook his head. "Mustn't get tight," he said to himself, and went downstairs to the cloakroom, and washed his face in cold water.

"Right you are!" said Ryder when the telephone bell rang and Lambert, who had already been waiting for over twenty minutes in the Private Secretary's outer office, drew open the green baize door and walked towards the desk where Sir Arthur Baggott was sitting with his back to the window.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said in a friendly voice. "I've been up to my ears in it. Do sit down!"

Lambert drew an upright chair to the side of the table, and said, "I didn't want to bother you. I know how busy you are. I wouldn't have done so, but it's important. It's about the report."

"What report?"

"The Brangwyn Report—"

"The Brangwyn Report—wretched business. Very bad business."

They both were silent, and looked down at the table in a mourning tribute to Brangwyn and the report.

"I wonder," said Baggott, "I hope you don't mind me mentioning this to you, Martin—you've been on leave, I understand—I wonder if you've noticed that we're wearing black ties?"

He tightened the knot of his black, knitted-silk tie. At the same time, Lambert put his hand to his own grey tie, and

said, "Yes, I did notice. I've been in the country, and didn't have time to change."

And, having offered his apology, he suppressed a surge of resentment against Baggott who with his customary technique had obliged him to defend himself at the outset of the conversation.

"Yes, of course," said Baggott magnanimously. "Of course. It's a spontaneous expression of respect. That's all there is to it. Poor old Andrew—and James." His eyes became sharp and official. "He should never have gone, you know. It's been a long-standing tradition that the Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under-Secretary should never be out of the country together—much less fly together. The trouble with James is that he was a weak man. He never realised that the first job of the Permanent Under-Secretary on the very first day that a Foreign Secretary arrives is to assert himself."

"How?"

Baggott laughed.

"You'd better go to the Private Secretaries' Room and ask there. I'll tell you this, Martin. The politician's never been born who in the long run can stand up to a determined Civil Servant. Oh, I know that some tough Minister can come along and throw his weight about. He'll stir up the Department—study the functional diagram—say he wants this and that. And then he'll have to go off to a dinner or a conference or to a Cabinet meeting. And in the meantime, the Civil Servant will be co-operating with his great ally—inertia. Inertia—it's eminent among the graces."

He offered Lambert a cigarette from a pigskin cigarette-case, and fitted one for himself into a black holder.

"You know about the Service at the Abbey on Friday. . . ."

"I read about it in *The Times*."

"Good. The P.M. will be there. You'll bring Eleanore, of course."

He took a deep breath of smoke, and breathed it out with contentment through his nose and mouth and ears till he was circled in a blue, drifting aura.

"Eleanore's in France," Lambert answered shortly.

"Ah, yes, Trudi told me about it. How is she?"

"She's been ill."

"Yes," said Baggott. "Yes." He had seen his barb settle and quiver in the flesh, and was ready to change the subject. "It's going to be very awkward if they move for a Select Committee," he said.

"Select Committee?" Lambert asked.

"There's a Back-Bench motion—I imagine the Chief Whip put them up to it—calling for a Committee of Inquiry into Subversive Influences in the Civil Service."

"But that's an old story. Sir Walter Cockburne asks a question about it every session."

"This is rather different," said Baggott. "This is the first time that it's been established that there is specific trouble in the Foreign Office. Previously, it was hearsay. Now . . ." Baggott shrugged his shoulders and went on. "We can't have the press hinting that we tolerate a coterie of homosexual crypto-Communists. You saw the papers this morning. . . ."

"Yes. There was nothing but the usual gossip and speculation about the Brangwyn Report."

"Well," said Baggott, putting the tips of his small hands together, "we'll see. The simple fact is that someone here—here in the Foreign Office—has committed an act of treason. A Foreign Office paper has been handed over to *Le Monde Populaire*. It's been published by every newspaper in Eastern Europe. It's given the French Communist Party—let's face it—the biggest boost it's had for years. For the last

three days, the Czechs and the Bulgars and God-knows-who have been broadcasting selected extracts six or seven times a day. We can't say to the Prime Minister or to Parliament —or to the nation, 'We're frightfully sorry. There's been a mistake—a slip-up.' " He relished the word "slip-up" and repeated it ironically. "Besides," he said, "it isn't very obscure or mysterious. The War Office had warned Gorse-Jones about it long ago. Sparr-Gamby was always a risk—odious fellow. I'd have had him out long ago."

Lambert watched him as he spoke, precise, articulate and vindictive, every hatred treasured, delicately moving over his doubts, but tenacious in the footholds of his certainties.

"At any rate," said Baggott, "I'm distracting you. What did you want to tell me? I understand you wanted to see the Prime Minister."

"Yes."

"Well, I hope I'll do."

"I think so," said Lambert, and welcomed the flicker of annoyance that passed over Baggott's face.

"I wanted to tell you the exact circumstances in which the Brangwyn Report was handed over to *Le Monde Populaire.*"

"That is very good of you," said Baggott calmly, but the tiny red veins on his cheekbones darkened. "Have a cigarette!"

"No, thanks," said Lambert. He wanted to tell Baggott quickly how it happened, so that he could return to the country.

"Last Friday evening . . ." he began, and Baggott listened with his hand over his eyes, unmoving.

"That is very interesting," said Baggott when Lambert had finished. "Very interesting indeed. You are suggesting that the Foreign Secretary himself—in effect— handed over

this highly confidential paper."

"I'm not making a suggestion," Lambert said frigidly. "I'm telling it to you as a fact."

Suddenly, he felt hungry and the room seemed to darken with Baggott retreating far away and beyond his contact.

"I see," said Baggott. "And as a further fact, you are suggesting—no, stating—that the Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under-Secretary together conspired with you to betray—for that's what it is—a Cabinet paper with all the embarrassing—and harmful—results that have come from it."

"I've already explained," said Lambert. "I had nothing to do with the policy; Brangwyn virtually told me to mind my own business about that. He conceived the whole thing, and if it turned out badly—that was his affair. All I wanted to tell you was how the report leaked out. I've done that. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"You're getting rather excited," said Baggott. "Are you quite well?"

"I'm in excellent health," said Lambert. "What are you implying?"

"Nothing," said Baggott, raising his hand deprecatingly. "You don't look well. You look tired—overstrained."

Again he returned to perspective in Lambert's eyes.

"I wonder," he said, "if you'd tell me a little more about Friday night. Did anyone see you go into the Foreign Secretary's room?"

"No."

"No. I thought not. And what was the name of the young man you gave the paper to in the Tate?"

"You mean, the Royal Academy."

"Yes. I knew it was somewhere artistic. What was his name?"

Lambert hesitated, and said, "I don't know."

"You don't know. I see. Do you remember perhaps what he looked like?"

Again Lambert hesitated and then he said, "He was a rather nondescript Frenchman."

"Yes," said Baggott reflectively, as if to himself. "Yes."

He rose, and walked over to Lambert's chair.

"Tell me, Martin. Why have you this terrible grudge against Brangwyn?"

"Grudge?" Lambert repeated. He looked at Baggott in bewilderment. "What grudge are you talking about?"

"Why are you uttering this frightful slander against a dead man who can't reply?" Baggott asked in an emphatic voice. He walked back to the other side of his desk and, still standing, said, "I would have thought you'd have had more consideration for Mary. Andrew's dead, and Padley may die at any hour. And you come here—with this miserable, mean, cock-and-bull story."

Lambert looked up at him and said.

"Don't be so damned pompous, Baggott. I've told you the truth—every word of it."

"I really think you're unwell," said Baggott. He leaned forward over the table. "For your information, Lambert, we know—know definitely—that the paper was given to *Le Monde Populaire* by Sparr-Gamby. He'd been feeding them with stuff for nearly two years."

Again the light behind Baggott turned him into a silhouette retreating from the focus of Lambert's vision.

"Look here, Baggott," he said. "What I've told you is the truth. I know. I was there. Sparr-Gamby had nothing to do with this—don't look at me like that—Good God, man!"

He waved his arm, and knocked a calendar to the floor.

"You'd better take a grip of yourself," said Baggott.

"You're becoming hysterical." He stopped, and his eyes became spiteful. "You can't afford to have two members of your family ill."

"You disgusting little. . . ." Lambert began, rising to his feet. He stopped and looked down on Baggott, who had become pale and was ringing for his secretary.

"I will recommend your suspension," said Baggott, his mouth trembling. "I will recommend your suspension. Ryder!" to his secretary who had entered and was looking at him in surprise, "I am recommending Lambert's suspension. Brangwyn was right. He's . . . see him out!"

The cold afternoon sun was already setting when Lambert, after he had drunk a cup of tea in a Lyons shop near Whitehall, entered St. James's Park. Near the artificial islands, the ducks huddled in the slime-green water away from the wind that blew diagonally across the lake, scalloping it into small waves, and bringing in puffs the smell of burnt leaves. The globular lamps along the Mall were citron against the darkening sky, and all around, from the Palace to the Colonial Office, windows had begun to glow in time with the advancing dusk.

Lambert raised his coat collar against the wind and began to walk towards the ornamental bridge in the brisk procession of Civil Servants, bowler-hatted Guards officers, typists and mothers with perambulators. Here and there, along the serpentine asphalt path between the lake and the lawns, the benches were occupied by solitary figures in a reverie that cocooned them against the cold, and by lovers, private and without conversation, who, unable to find any other meeting-place, sat warmed by each other's touch, staring at the bending reeds and absorbed in their public asylum.

Again the conditionals. If he were to resign and leave the Service, dragging from the scene with Baggott the decision that he had been unwilling to make on his own behalf, if he were to tell Eleanore that now there was no purpose in repair and pretence, if he were to see Ledward, who had told him, in the spring, "Come and see me if you leave the F.O. I'm looking for a Rome correspondent"—he might begin again. He was thirty-nine, not too old to start a new career. Everything that he had done—his work, his connections, his travel—would be in the design of his new occupation. It was a prospect of liberty. To leave the Foreign Office, to have done with Baggott, Radcliffe, Curwen-Legge, never again to have to account for Eleanore, and to forget Foreign Service Regulation No. 3. He had rehearsed it in his memory like a threatening letter in the hope, frustrated at each recall, that within the menace there might be some imperfection, an outlet from its encirclement.

"If a member of the Foreign Service becomes involved in a matrimonial suit which may, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, bring discredit upon that member or upon the Service, the Secretary of State may call upon him to resign. . . ." And so it would have been. Brangwyn and Baggott had watched and probed and waited, examining at intervals the festering discredit until the time when the regulation would allow it to be lanced.

"A member of the Service who becomes involved in a divorce suit must, therefore, notify the head of the Personnel Department of the facts of the case at the earliest possible moment."

But there had been no facts to tell them. They had waited with curiosity, and then with disappointment and, at the end, with irritation, for him to declare his difficulties. "How is Eleanore?" "She is well—she is ill—she's better—she's on holiday—she'll be back soon." He had smiled and thanked

them for their kind inquiries. And they had smiled and waited another month.

Now it was different. They weren't driving him away. It would be an act of free-will, a decision, not a penalty but a prize. He would liberate himself from Regulation No. 3 by renouncing the Service that imposed it. He would live in Rome. And he remembered the hot, dry air of the Pincio Gardens, the statues scaled with time, the smell of the pepper trees and the white magnolias where the road rises near the Villa Borghese. And perhaps—if it were possible—perhaps it wasn't absurd—it was not uncommon—it wasn't only arithmetic—one was a child and an adolescent and at last an adult and to be an adult covered a whole area of time—perhaps, he thought as he crossed the ornamental bridge with his head lowered against the wind, perhaps he might marry Valerie.

He might marry Valerie. The thought, admitted to his mind, grew tumescent, powerful and full of wonder, a voluptuous, releasing paean. The nape of her neck with the hair falling in two strands. Her gentle attention. Her quiet presence far from Eleanore's eyes distracted by exhilaration or despair. Valerie was eighteen. Thousands of girls married at eighteen. In a year's time—if Eleanore divorced him—they would live in Rome, and for their honeymoon, they would go to Ischia. And they would walk over the hills among the *ginèstra,* far away from everything, from the Foreign Office, from Eleanore and even from old Fergusson who was getting boring.

There was no doubt about it. Fergusson was rather tiresome. If he had his way, he'd keep Valerie permanently in a gym-slip. After ignoring her for years, he had now decided to exercise his parental responsibilities. And he'd been oversolemn last night in his advice. He was a pipe-sucker.

Lambert disliked people who spoke between pipe-sucks. He had pipe-sucked as he pressed Lambert to explain about the Brangwyn Report. And when Lambert came to think of it, he might have done better to be silent. Sooner or later, they would have known that Sparr-Gamby was blameless. . . . No one would ever admit that Brangwyn himself was involved in the stratagem, even though they knew it to be true. If he had said nothing, the Brangwyn Report would have been interred with its author, covered by the Foreign Office with earth, and *The Times* would have spoken its requiem. They'd all exaggerated.

He decided that he would make a formal statement in writing to the Prime Minister.

After he had crossed the bridge, he turned, and with the wind behind him, walked back in the direction of The Horse Guards Parade. A girl passed, smiling to herself. She was younger than Valerie, but she had the same untroubled expression on her face, the same air of private delight, the same indifference to season and time, and he retained her image in his mind, quickening his pace in order that he might the sooner leave London and be tranquil in Valerie's presence.

The water of the lake had darkened with dusk, and the park was emptying. Through the Mall, the traffic moved urgently; and Lambert himself, although his hat touched his forehead in a damp rim, wanted, in the homeward exhilaration, to break into a run through the sporadic walkers with their attaché cases and umbrellas and brief-cases as they advanced over the sodden, leaf-strewn path.

A man in a raincoat got in his way, and Lambert took a step to the side.

"Hello, Lambert," said a familiar voice. Barraclough was standing in front of him, hands in pockets.

"Hello, Barraclough," he answered.

"Cold!" said Barraclough. "Have you noticed how the ducks keep out of the wind?"

He took his pipe from his mouth and said, "Going back to the country?"

"Look here, Barraclough," said Lambert, "are you following me?"

"Following you?" said Barraclough. "You saw me come from the opposite direction."

"But you knew I was in the park."

"Yes. It's cold. Let's walk along together. They told me at the F.O. that you'd been there—and given Baggott hell. You oughtn't to bully him. He's only a little fellow."

Lambert walked on without answering.

"I have to keep in touch," said Barraclough, half-apologetically. "And they've got to keep in touch with me. We tell each other everything—like husbands and wives. Poor old Jones! He's off his head, with worry about the report."

He removed the pipe-stem and blew through it as they walked.

"They've made up their mind that it's Sparr-Gamby. . . . And that if it's not Sparr-Gamby it had better be."

Lambert paused at a wooden bench, and faced Barraclough. "You know why I went to the Foreign Office this afternoon?"

"I'm not sure."

"Don't lie, Barraclough, and stop being . . ."

Barraclough smiled cordially at him. "I told you I'm not sure," he said. "Baggott told me—in general terms."

"Do you believe Sparr-Gamby handed the thing over?"

"I doubt it."

"Do you believe . . . ?" Lambert hesitated.

"Well," said Barraclough, encouragingly.

"Do you believe me when I tell you that Brangwyn him-

self was responsible for the report leaking to France?"

"I don't know. Brangwyn's dead."

Lambert began to walk again in the direction of the island. "In that case, there's nothing more I can tell you."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Barraclough. "You see, you said to Baggott this afternoon that you yourself had some part in this—that you yourself gave Augier the paper through his 'stringer.' "

"Well?"

"Well, I don't think we need go much further for the moment." Barraclough didn't look at Lambert as he spoke. "What's the point of bringing in all the fol-de-rols about Brangwyn and Padley? Why shouldn't you have given Augier the paper off your own bat?"

"Why . . . ?" Lambert hesitated again. "The trouble with you military policemen," he said, "is that you're simple to the point of ingenuity. Why should I have given Augier the report?"

Barraclough stopped, and began to stuff his pipe with tobacco. "I mustn't keep you," he said. "I know you're anxious to get back to your friend Fergusson. But you did give Augier the report, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "I did."

And before he could continue, Barraclough had turned his back on him, and was walking briskly towards the granite annexe of the War Office.

VIII

"GOING UP! WHICH floor, sir?"

"I don't know," Lambert answered. "Sir James Padley . . ."

"Fifth floor," the liftman answered, examining the empty vestibule in search of more passengers. "No visitors!"

"That's all right," said Lambert. "I'm from the Foreign Office."

The liftman looked at him doubtfully. "They're not letting anyone in. . . . Anyway, Matron doesn't like visitors after six."

"Just take me up," said Lambert.

The liftman hesitated, and then closed the door.

"Well, don't say I didn't tell you," he said, and pressed a button. The grille moved heavily into position, and the lift began its slow, lurching progress upwards.

"Old-fashioned, these lifts," he said. "Time they were changed—specially in the Private Wing."

The lift clicked as it passed the first floor, and Lambert caught a glimpse of a dark hospital corridor.

"You get used to it, though," said the liftman. "After the war—the first one—when I was demobbed—I worked in a nursing home in Welbeck Street. They had a lift there you worked with a rope. Talk about pull! You had to ring it like a church bell. Hydraulic!"

"Oh, yes," said Lambert.

"Hard on the feet," said the liftman. "See this leg?"

"Yes."

"It's artificial. Funny how quick you get used to it."

The lift clanked steadily past the second floor.

"We go on automatic at seven," said the liftman.

Lambert stared at the iron trellis without answering.

"I once knew a chap at the Foreign Office," said the liftman.

"Which department?" Lambert asked.

"Electrical," said the liftman. "Ministry of Works really. He looked after the fittings. Name of Stephens.

"Bill Stephens?"

"That's him."

Lambert looked at the liftman's face for the first time. It was a tired, gentle face that had accumulated a store of sympathy, gathered in synoptic conversations from transient companionships. They smiled to each other, and Lambert said, "I like Bill Stephens. Very useful man."

"Doesn't get on with his wife," said the liftman. "Here you are, sir. Fifth floor. Good-night!"

"Good-night," said Lambert, and stood for a few moments outside the lift shaft waiting for a nurse from whom he could inquire about Sir James Padley.

In front of him were the numbered doors of the private rooms, each ticketed with the name of patient and doctor, each with vases and bowls of flowers assembled outside as if around an altar. Their scent mingled with a dominant smell of antiseptic and the rubber floor.

"I say!" Lambert said to a nurse who walked gracefully towards him, carrying an object under a napkin. Like an indolent waitress, she ignored him, unhurried in her indifference, and disappeared at the other end of the dark and deserted corridor.

An indicator board flashed with the illuminated numbers of rooms, and he walked towards it. Through a low transom window, he could see a nurse writing at a table. He knocked, and pushed the swing doors open.

"Yes?" she asked sharply.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Sister," Lambert said. "My name is Lambert. I'm from the Foreign Office. I've come to see Sir James Padley."

She stopped writing and stood up. She was tall with a clear, fresh complexion, and her uniform, as she rose, rustled in the silence.

"Good-evening," she said. "I was a bit surprised, you see." Her voice had taken on a light cadence. "I'm Sister Llewellyn. But I'm sorry visitors aren't allowed. Sir James is very ill."

"I know," said Lambert. "I didn't want to see him for very long. I'm a friend of his—"

"He's very ill," she repeated. "Here is the press bulletin."

Lambert glanced at the slip of paper that she held out towards him, and she put it down.

" 'Sir James Padley is still unconscious'—it's not very informative," he said. "I want to know how he is." He raised his voice, and added, "I want to know the truth."

"Would you like to take a seat, sir?" the Sister asked. "I'll just go out and make some inquiries."

"In a moment," said Lambert, standing between her and the door. "What does Sir Horace Zinner say?"

He saw her face flush and become pale, and she said, "I can't discuss patients without permission. Will you excuse me?"

He stepped aside, and she went out hurriedly. Within a few seconds, she returned with a thick-set man in a blue serge suit who wore his hair smoothed in three stripes over an otherwise almost bald head, and said, "This gentleman

says he's a friend of Sir James."

"Hello, Veale," said Lambert. The last time he had seen Padley's detective had been at the airport.

"Hello, sir," the other answered, smiling. "You've been frightening Sister. She came for police protection."

"I didn't," said the nurse.

"Yes, you did," said Veale. He had a resonant, healthy laugh that made the glass in the cabinets tinkle. "She thought, sir, that you'd come to blow us all up."

"Well, how was I to know?" said Sister Llewellyn to Lambert. "You looked so menacing. Would you like a cup of tea, sir?"

"No, thanks," said Lambert. "I only wanted to find out about Sir James."

"He's bad," said Veale, suddenly serious. "I've been on duty twelve hours a day outside that door. . . . By the way, there's a terrible draught down that corridor. . . ."

"You want a muff for your feet," said the nurse. "I'll lend you mine."

They both laughed uproariously.

"Go on," said Lambert to Veale.

"Well, he seems to be fading—I keep looking through the observation hatch—every quarter of an hour at least—that's the order—and he looks to me as if he's dying—bit by bit."

"What does Sir Horace Zinner say?"

"I don't know. It's pretty hopeless. Sister, show Mr. Lambert the report."

"Certainly not," said Sister Llewellyn. "I dare not. Do you want a cup of tea?"

"What—me?" said Veale, mimicking her. "I dare not."

"You're a goose," said the Sister, and threw a pair of pliers at him.

"Attempting to do actual bodily harm," said Veale. "If Mr. Lambert weren't here, I'd take you in charge."

("Stop it! Stop it! For Christ's sake, stop it!" Lambert said to himself. Outside the corridors were lined with pain, and the detective and the nurse were coquetting.)

"Do you think I could look at him for a moment, Veale?" Lambert asked.

"All right, sir," said Veale. "Let's ask the Special. Our orders are a twenty-four hours' watch. It doesn't really matter. . . ."

"Where is he?" Lambert interrupted impatiently.

"I'll take you along. . . . Are you feeling all right, sir?"

"Yes."

"I'll have a cup of tea for you, Veale," said the nurse. "And remember, no one's to go in."

"Right you are, Sister," said Veale, and they gave each other an affectionate leer before he followed Lambert into the corridor.

"It gets quiet at night," said Veale. "Everything looks different—even the corridors."

He stood aside to let a student nurse go by, wheeling a trolley.

"It's different in the daytime when everybody's busy. But at night—it's a bit like a prison. All the doors closed —everyone in pain or lying awake in the dark or drugged. . . ."

"You're getting morbid, Veale. . . ."

"Well, it makes you think, you know. When I've been on night duty—at about three or four in the morning—that's when it gets you. The temperature suddenly drops. . . . They wanted me to go to Rome. Took me off at the last minute and sent Edwards instead. . . . Poor old Edwards! That's how it is."

"How's your family?"

"Oh, very well, sir. I don't get round to seeing much of the kids. Not on this job."

They had reached Room 24, and Veale pointed to a chair with a small table, lit with a desk-lamp, outside.

"My office!" he said, and he laughed loudly.

Lambert turned his head to the card on the door, "Sir James Padley: Sir Horace Zinner," and Veale said, "He's very bad, sir."

"Do you know what Zinner says?" Lambert asked.

Veale glanced quickly up and down the corridor, and said, "Here—take a load of this."

He drew a report-card from his inside pocket and handed it to Lambert.

"Where did you get this?" Lambert asked.

"I snitched it," said Veale proudly, "from Sister Llewellyn."

"Thank you, Veale," he said. He walked towards the door as if to enter the room, but Veale put out his hand firmly and said, "Sorry, sir. I can't allow visitors. Those are strict orders." He peered through the panel, said: "The Special has gone off for a minute. Wait till she gets back. She might let you look through the door."

"I only want to go in—for a few moments," said Lambert.

"Not even for a few moments, sir," said Veale. "It isn't doctor's orders. They're security orders. The only visitors allowed are the doctors, his son—not even his daughter-in-law—the nurses and the Special. . . . Here, sir. You can take a look through the glass."

Lambert pressed his brow against the observation-panel, straining to distinguish the shapes in the blue-lit room.

"I can't see a thing," he said.

"Shut your eyes, sir," said Veale, putting his head close to Lambert's. "Then open them. . . . You'll see. . . ."

When Lambert opened his eyes again, he saw a screen by the window, an arm-chair, the end of the bed, two glimmering swathes on the blankets and a white cone, immobile, like a bolster placed longitudinally. The small blue light threw no shadow; the room was phosphorescent like the interior of a cave. The two men stared for a few seconds, till Veale drew away and said, "That's how it is. Never moves. Not since they brought him in from Uxbridge."

"What does Zinner say about his chances?" Lambert asked. "Is there any chance?"

"You never know with Zinner," said Veale. "Young Padley asked him just that—I heard him—and he said, 'I'm not God' and then young Padley asked him about the details, and all Zinner did was complain about the Health Service. You know these specialists. . . ."

"Would you like a cup of tea, now?" asked Sister Llewellyn, returning.

"You carry on, Veale," said Lambert. "I'll stay here till you come back."

Veale hesitated, and the nurse said, "All right—if you don't want to!"

"Yes, I do!" said Veale hastily, and added in friendly flippancy. "I'll leave you in charge, Mr. Lambert—five minutes."

"I won't go away," said Lambert.

"There's the evening paper," said Veale, and he walked away laughing with the nurse.

Lambert sat at the table and began to read the newspaper from the back page, turning through the sports news and the theatre columns and the advertisements and the petty crime and divorces and the gossip paragraphs of "London by Night" till he came to the editorial. The title was "Unsafe, Unsound"; and he read it as if it referred to a foreign

country and persons whom he had never known.

"No one," said the editorial, "wishes to introduce in Britain methods of security which are repugnant to our national tradition. Yet the first duty of the state is to defend itself. The issue of the Brangwyn Report raises larger questions of public confidence in the administration of the Foreign Office and in its ability to provide essential safeguards against the treasonable betrayal of the nation's secrets. If we use emphatic language, it is because the situation requires drastic action. The nation's mind will not be at ease until those guilty of the treacherous delivery of the Brangwyn Report have been identified, tried and punished."

Lambert turned to the front page, and read the headline, "BRANGWYN AIRCRASH: SABOTAGE NOT RULED OUT SAYS MINISTER OF TRANSPORT." Beneath the report of the Minister's reply to a Parliamentary question about the circumstances of the crash was a box set in heavy black type:

"Sensational developments (says our Diplomatic Correspondent) are expected in the Brangwyn Case during the next few days. High Foreign Office officials have been questioned. Superintendent Raynes called at the War Office this morning. It is understood that a member of the Foreign Service has been suspended from his duties pending the outcome of these investigations."

"LATE NIGHT FINAL," said the lettering at the top of the page. Lambert read the paragraph again, and said, "It's about me. To hell with them. . . ."

"To hell with them," he said again, and pushed open the door of Room 24, and went inside. As if not to disturb Padley, he closed it gently behind him, and went on tip-toe

to the edge of the bed. He put his hands on the cold rail, and waited till his eyes became accustomed to the livid light that fell on the blankets in the colour of a fading bruise. He followed with his gaze the mummy-like shape in the bed, the two arms swaddled in gauze, darkened in patches, and the head propped up in a grotesque white turban. Throughout the room hung a mild, sweet stench.

Lambert came to the side of the bed, and looked more closely at Padley. In his pocket his hand clutched his torch, and he took it out, and sat for a short time in the arm-chair, with his thumb on the switch. Of Padley's face he could only see the nose, and forehead, and the cavernous darkness of his eyes. His eyebrows had been burnt away.

"James!" he said in a whisper. The inert body lay on the bed like an effigy on a tomb. "James!" he said more loudly. "James!"

As he leaned forward, he saw Padley's eyes open and glitter, and he leapt to his feet, with his torch lit and playing over Padley's face. But the door of the kitchen on the other side of the corridor whose light had shone through the observation panel, closed; and the illusion that Padley's eyes had opened was gone.

"James!" Lambert called again.

The torchlight showed his pale thin face, the yellow stains on the bandages and the movement of his breath under the blankets, tender and shallow as an infant's.

"James! It's Lambert—Lambert—" he called in an urgent whisper as if his voice could penetrate the layers and layers of Padley's unconsciousness to the mysterious abstracted world where he was breathing. "Wake up, James," he said. "Wake up and tell them."

Brangwyn and Padley. The dead and the dying. To hell with them. To hell with them all.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" a woman's voice asked angrily.

"Who are you?" Lambert asked the nurse who was taking off her cape.

"I'm the Special. You shouldn't be here."

"No," said Lambert. "There's no point in it."

He went to the Sisters' Room where Veale, now drinking his third cup of tea, was explaining to four admiring nurses the mechanism of his revolver.

"You'd better get back, Veale," he said. "There's a strange woman in Number twenty-four."

Veale hurriedly drank his tea, and said, "Thanks, that'll be Grimethorpe. Good-night all."

"Good-night—and don't shoot yourself," said a dark young nurse. Delighted with the amiability, Veale left, laughing, followed by a farewell stream of giggles.

IX

FAR BELOW, BOOMING in the funnel of the lift-shaft, a door slammed, and Lambert waited, hat in hand, for the lift to ascend. It rose like a diving-bell from the sea, its dome slit at the side with the light that filtered through the ventilator. It stopped and Lambert waited for the grille to open. But he saw that the empty lift had come up automatically, and he opened first the outer gate and then pushed back the inner, resistant grating.

The time was a quarter past eight, and he estimated that if he spent no more than half an hour at some restaurant on the way to Pelling, he could arrive long before midnight. For the first time since the morning, he felt hungry, and as he pressed the button opposite the bronze sign "Ground Floor," he decided that he would eat after all at the White Tower in Charlotte Street only a few hundred yards away.

The lift released itself with a faint hesitation and began to trundle downwards towards the fourth floor, and Lambert remembered Padley, lying as if in the cerements of one already dead, and the antiseptic smell, and the corpses in the Italian sun on Route Five during the war. At that moment, the lift stopped, and Lambert pulled the brass handle to open the door. He then saw that opposite the gate was not the hospital corridor but the brickwork wall of the lift-shaft.

"Christ!" he said aloud.

He pressed the ground floor button, and the lift began to move downwards again. Lambert's heart accelerated its beat, and he wiped his hands on the side of his coat. The lift reached the fourth floor, and Lambert drew a deep breath as he saw the corridors and felt the lift, nonchalant and unhurried, sinking past the thick concrete marked "Four" in black paint.

A second later, the lift stopped again. Looking up, Lambert saw that it overtopped the floor by about six inches, but opposite him was the wall. He pressed the button hard, and waited as if for an answer to a doorbell. Nothing happened. He put his hat on the porter's stool, and pressed the button again. Still nothing. He kept his eyes on the few inches above the floor, and pressed the red "Alarm Bell." He listened for its ring, but there was no sound.

"Hello!" he called out. "Anyone there?"

There was no reply. He shouted again; and this time, he heard muffled voices rising up the lift-shaft, followed by a woman's voice from above, "Are you all right?"

He looked up, and saw the mouth and nose of someone who was lying on the floor above in order to be able to speak to him.

"Yes," he said. "I'm all right. Do you know what's happened?"

"Nothing much," said the nurse. "Something gone wrong with the lift. Soon have you down. How do you feel?"

"I feel ridiculous," said Lambert. "Like a monkey in a cage. How long are they going to be?"

"Not long."

"Could you throw me a cigarette?"

The nurse went away, and returned with three cigarettes that she flicked through the grille. Two fell on the floor, but one fell down the shaft.

"What's it like there?" the nurse asked.

"It's getting rather warm," Lambert answered. "How long are they going to be?"

"Not long," said the nurse. "The electricians are working on it already."

Lambert took his coat off and put it on the floor. Above him, he could see a growing assembly of feet—the feet of two women, three pairs of men's black shoes, and a pair of boots. He gave a savage pull at the handle of the gate and started rattling the grille.

"Don't do that, mate," a man called down to him. "You'll only get yourself tired. If you get through the gate, you've still got the wall. Easy does it. We'll have you out soon."

"Sorry," said Lambert. "Any idea how long it'll be?"

"Not long, chum. Got enough air?"

"No. It's getting damned hot."

"Well, get your head down by the bottom of the gate if it gets too hot."

The nurse came back, and said, "Hello, we're bringing you comforts."

She swung a bar of chocolate through the trellis, and Lambert caught it.

"Won't be long," she said. "How would you like a crossword? I'll send you one down in the next post."

"Bless you!" said Lambert, and he felt a cold stream of sweat trickle along his spine towards his kidneys. He smiled to the nurse, and when she went away, began to read the notice on the wall. "The Company accepts no responsibility. . . ." Repeat, "The Company accepts no responsibility." Repeat, "The Foreign Office accepts no responsibility." Repeat, "Brangwyn accepts no responsibility." Repeat, "Padley accepts no responsibility." Repeat, "No one accepts responsibility." No one accepts responsibility. No one except Lambert.

"You all right, chum?" the electrician's voice replaced the nurse's.

"I'm all right—perfectly all right. For God's sake get this damned thing started."

From the basement someone shouted instructions to a mechanic who answered from the dome of the lift. Lambert could hear the drumming of feet and the sharper sound of tools above his head.

"Have a go now, Charlie," the voice called. Lambert saw a new pair of boots land on the floor.

"Try it, brother," said the workman who had been talking to Lambert. "Press the third floor button."

Lambert stood and pressed the button. As he released it, the lift gave a shudder and began to descend. After it had sunk about eighteen inches, it stopped again, opposite the brickwork. Lambert pressed the third floor button again, then the ground floor button, and then splayed his hands over all the buttons. The lift was immobile.

Beyond the cage, the wall. Beyond the wall, a cage. And another, and another. Lambert tugged again at the handle till his hand became a red matrix of its design.

"Oh, God," he said, and stretched himself on the floor. The lift, unventilated by motion, was stiflingly hot, and seemed suddenly to have become lagged with a felting that denatured the sounds from above and below. The voices reached him without consonants, a ventriloquial mumble that struggled up from the interior of the shaft without emerging.

"Hello!" Lambert shouted, clutching the trellis of the gate. A few inches away, the brickwork rejected his voice like the mouthpiece of a telephone gone dead.

Lambert put out his hand and touched the wall. The air had condensed against it, leaving a surface of sweat.

"Hello!" he shouted at the top of his voice. A jangle of

vowels, the struggle of a dumb man, rose in answer. Lambert walked around the narrow lift, and climbed on the stool, trying to look through the ventilating slits. He could see nothing except the wafery fungus on the wall.

"I'll count," he said aloud. The exhaustion in his knees mingled with the beginning of panic.

"By the time I reach a thousand . . ."

Facing the brick wall, he sat himself on his overcoat, wiped his neck and face with his handkerchief, and began to count. When he reached fifty-seven he rose to his feet and began to shout again and rattle the gate.

He wanted to smoke, but he couldn't find a match. And then he wanted a drink. The thought became pervasive and desperate, and with it, the recollection of the cold air of the streets, the wind in the park, the open hill at Pelling. One of his hands began to bleed from the sharp edge of the grille, and the trickle of blood was a distraction. He tied his wet handkerchief around it and returned to his coat, and sat with his hands over his mouth.

"Quiet!" he said.

At Reggio, during the war, he waited for three days, in the camp for transient officers, a two-floored barn, to get an aeroplane from the airstrip. He had a bed on the second floor. During the third night, there was a heavy air attack and he woke to a clatter of gunfire and the stumbling of the other officers making for cover. But in the bed next to his was an American Colonel, a Ranger, arrogant and aggressive, who earlier in the day had antagonised the mess with his truculent *bonhomie*. He lay without moving, and Lambert watched him in the leaping and fading flames from a burning farm house. As he watched, he saw the Colonel open one eye and look at him and close it again. And while the barn shook and creaked at the thud of bombs, Lambert

and the Colonel lay and observed each other to see who would run first.

When the guns burst into a new rattle, lighting the room, Lambert saw the Colonel's face glistening and he was pleased. But after a time the aeroplanes murmured away in the distance and the guns became silent.

The Colonel opened one eye and said, "You've got to sweat it out!"

"Yes," said Lambert, and fell into a contented sleep.

In the lift, Lambert dozed for a few moments.

"You've got to sweat it out," said the Colonel, in his dream. They were sitting in a low, closed cylinder. And Lambert saw that the Colonel was Barraclough. "The door won't pull," he said. "You've got to sweat it out. See my leg. It's artificial."

Lambert woke, gasping for breath. Facing him was the iron gate, and the brick wall.

He closed his eyes again, and suddenly the lift began to move downwards in little jolts. Lambert rose to his feet, and wiped his face. The third floor was coming into sight. He could see the caps of the nurses and the faces of three men gazing upwards.

"Don't stop . . . don't stop," he said to the lift. It jerked downwards, inch by inch, till it reached the third floor.

"All right, Charlie," said the liftman. "That'll do it."

He put his hand through the gate and unhinged its catch. Lambert straightened his tie, picked up his coat, and walked out into the corridor.

"Are you O.K., sir?" asked the liftman. "Didn't think I'd be seeing you so soon. They brought me back. . . ."

"Would you come for a cup of tea?" a nurse asked.

"No, thank you," said Lambert.

"You're soaking wet," said the liftman. "And your hand's bleeding."

"It's nothing," said Lambert. "How long was I in the lift? I broke my watch."

"About a quarter of an hour," the nurse answered.

"I was once caught in a lift," said the liftman. "Took them three hours to get us out."

"What did you do?" Lambert asked.

"I had a shut-eye," said the liftman. "Three hours' lovely sleep—with pay."

"Are you sure you don't want a cup of tea?" asked the nurse, looking at Lambert's white face.

"No, thanks."

"All right—by-bye."

"Good-night."

Lambert ran down the steps alongside the lift-shaft and into the street. When he reached his car, he lowered all the windows so that the air could dash itself against his face as he drove, steadily accelerating towards the by-pass.

For twenty minutes he drove in the even flow of cars and lorries from London, thinking of Valerie, till on the curve of a hill, he saw stretched out in front of him the orange and green lights of the airport, the B.E.A. signs flashing like the illuminations of a fun-fair. He drew up at the side of the road and listened to the rumbling of an aircraft warming up in the darkness. Above he could hear the calm, assured sound of another aeroplane coming in to land from the clear, starlit sky. No mark of wreckage; no memory of disaster. Traffic is normal. Twelve flights to Paris; six to Rome; two to Athens; two a week to Nicosia.

Everything was normal. They would arrive at night, and fly to Rome. It would be the first time she had flown and he would make all the arrangements. Among unknown people

they would look down in the darkness on cities and rivers, clusters and avenues of mysterious lights, their hands and arms linked, and they would descend in a far-off place, away from melancholy hospitals and Baggott and Fergusson and the evening papers and the Establishment Officer and boisterous nurses.

It was three minutes past nine and he switched on his wireless-set and heard the announcer say, ". . . 'a major defeat for the cause of the West and will give heart to its enemies.' The Leader of the Opposition went on to say that the cancellation of the Rome Conference was a direct result of the publication of the Brangwyn Report, and would set back the cause of Western co-operation by five years. It is understood that the Prime Minister is personally . . ."

Lambert switched off the wireless, but the diminished words "taking an . . ." lingered. He turned the car around and drove back to London. His mind was made up. He would never go back to the Foreign Office.

He would collect a few shirts and another suit, and then return to Pelling and wait.

"Mrs. Coles!" he called out when he entered his flat, and remembered that it was her night out. On the floor of his bedroom were two envelopes. He bent and picked them up, and noted that Mrs. Coles was getting old and lazy. Next to his bed a novel by Pellegrino that he had been reading was turned downwards with its spine forming a longitudinal ridge above its riffled pages. "I meant to tell her," he said to himself, and went into the drawing-room to get a drink from the cabinet.

His bureau drawers were half open, and a crystal vase lay unbroken on the floor, together with a report on the Information Services in Germany. Lambert took out his key to unlock the desk of his bureau, but then he saw that

it was already gaping where the splintered woodwork of the top lock had been hacked with a chisel. The contents of the small side-drawers—letters, invitations, rubbers, pencils, visiting-cards and dust—lay piled in an indecent mass on his writing-pad. Lambert flicked the heap with his fingers, and opened the top left-hand drawer. All his diaries had gone. He pulled out the second drawer where he kept his dress studs and links and a cigarette-case that the Marlows had given him in New York. They were all there, boxed and secure. Lambert looked in the bottom drawer where he kept his passport and personal papers: they were still neatly stacked and undisturbed, but an album of photographs which he had taken in America had disappeared.

He poured himself a glass of whisky and was about to light a cigarette when the curtain stirred and he jumped to his feet and dashed it aside. The window, slightly ajar, was as he had left it days ago. He walked into the dining-room and stirred with his foot a wastepaper basket that had been upturned and its contents combed and scattered.

In the drawing-room he telephoned the porter. "Did anybody want me?" he asked. "Any messages?"

"No, sir," said the porter. "Nobody—except now."

"I don't understand you. . . ."

"Well. Your two friends. Mrs. Coles let them in about an hour ago before she went out. They asked if you were in, and they said they'd wait. The two who just went . . ."

"I see. Thank you very much."

Lambert began to pick up the letters and papers and to close the drawers. His address-book had fallen near his desk and lay open at the letter "C." Cartwright. Peter Cartwright. He was at the Treasury now, and although they didn't see each other often, they had been close friends during the war. They had even shared a room at the Albergo Reale in Pisa for six weeks. Peter Cartwright. The name

was like a familiar landmark in a miasma. He dialled his number.

"Hello, Peter," he said. "This is Martin—Martin Lambert."

"Hello, Martin," said Cartwright, relaxed, unhurried, his voice plummy and gagged. "How are you?"

"I'm fine. Have you eaten yet?"

"Good lord, yes. It's nearly ten. What strange habits . . ."

"Are you doing anything?"

"Frankly—yes. I'm . . . Well, never mind about that. Tell me, Martin—I hear you've been tangling with Baggott. . . ."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? Everyone knows. It's all over London. The place is humming. You've become a classic reference."

"What about a drink later on?"

"I can't—I'm tied up. . . . What's all this about you being suspended, Martin?"

"It's quite true."

"My word, what's the F.O. coming to. . . ."

"Shall we have dinner next week—at the Allegretto?"

"Hold on, Martin. I'll look at my diary."

Lambert heard the pages turning.

"No—next week's no good," said Cartwright. "Absolutely full."

"What about lunch?"

Cartwright's voice became precise. "Never lunch out nowadays—the Budget's only six months away."

"And dinner the week after. . . ?"

He heard Cartwright's uneasy cough. "I'll give you a ring, Martin. How would that be?"

"That would be excellent. Right ho, Peter."

"Cheerio, Martin."

Lambert gathered up a letter that had slid into the fireplace. It was an angry, protesting letter that Eleanore had sent him a year ago. He was about to tear it in two, but instead threw it into the disorder of the other papers on the bureau desk.

X

"THE FOREIGN OFFICE," said Fergusson, taking the platter of cheese from Valerie's hand and scooping out a portion of Stilton, "has always been torn between the Gothic and the Venetian. There was a most awful row about the design of the Office in 1860. The Goths wanted the pinnacled gloom of neo-Pugin, and the Venetians protested that the Middle Ages was a time of superstition and immorality. Lord Palmerston was a Venetian. He told Sir Gilbert Scott that what he wanted was a palace, not a monastery."

He sipped a glass of port through his cheese, and went on, "Fortunately, the Venetians won. The original Gothic façade was sent to some railway hotel—at St. Pancras, I believe—where it still dispirits the parting traveller. . . ."

"Palladio . . ." Valerie began.

"Mind you," said Fergusson, "the Venetians flattered themselves and our climate. No sane person would compare the Foreign Office with San Giorgio Maggiore or the Capucine Church—or the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. But still—it's got the windows—the arch on the entablatures—the pilasters at the sides. All it lacks is sunlight and space. Space—it's the Northern substitute for sunlight. Inigo Jones knew that . . ."

He reflected for a few moments, and Valerie watched him patiently.

"I'm against the sad life," said Fergusson. "I'm for the Renaissance and the Mediterranean and the Italian Adriatic. There's no other West. The East begins on the Rhine. Mark you, Valerie, it needn't have done. The Germans were all right as long as they lived in principalities and stuck to chamber music and charades. They were ruined by Hegel."

Valerie knew the progress from that exordium, and composed herself to think of other matters.

"You see," said Fergusson. "They were getting along very nicely with Goethe and Schiller and Lessing—when along came this fellow Hegel and said that whatever's real is rational and whatever's rational is real—that liberty is order and order is liberty and that once you interconnect the parts of society, you've established the means to all good—the State. . . . The next step was to say that the German State was the manifestation of the world-spirit—and if the world-spirit said it was all right, well—it was. Hegel is the original anti-liberal, the father of all totalitarianism."

Fergusson's face became red and angry.

"I'm glad to say that when our Reform Bill was passed—it made him ill. What did Barraclough have to say to you?"

The familiar name impinged on her thought of Lambert driving his car through the darkness, and she raised her head abruptly.

"Colonel Barraclough," she said, "is a silly little man. He sat in the study talking about Oxford and French literature. . . . And every now and again asking me questions about Martin. So stupid! He tried to slip them in as a sort of afterthought—as if I wouldn't notice."

"What sort of questions?" Fergusson asked.

"Oh—how long had I known Martin—which of his friends I knew—whether he often came to see us—did I

know Eleanore—had Martin ever mentioned his domestic problems. I simply couldn't bear him. Besides, he's got hair in his ears."

Fergusson began to rise, and Valerie rose simultaneously.

"There was one other thing he wanted to know," she said.

"What was that?"

"Something quite extraordinary . . ."

Fergusson waited.

"He asked me whether I knew—if Martin had ever borrowed money from you."

"What did you say?"

"I said I had no idea. I haven't. Has Martin ever borrowed money from you?"

Fergusson crumpled his napkin on the table, and said, "As a matter of fact—yes, he has. Last year. He repaid it."

"Oh!"

"Don't look shocked. . . ."

"I'm not—not a bit."

"He needed money suddenly to pay for his wife's illness and her debts. He was in great difficulties, and I was glad to help him."

Valerie went up to him, and linked her arm in his.

"You're awfully kind, Daddy. Really you are."

"You're quite wrong, Valerie," Fergusson answered, walking with her across the hall to his study. "Behind my amiable exterior . . ."

"It isn't amiable, it's grumpy . . ."

"Well, at any rate—behind my exterior, there's a resolute, hard-headed thinker."

"That means you're going to suggest something unpleasant!"

"Not really. . . . How would you like it if we moved to town?"

"To London?"

"Yes, London."

Her eyes became bright with pleasure. At the word "London," she saw herself entering the foyer at Covent Garden with Lambert, and then taking their seats in the sixth row of the stalls, accompanied by trills of flutes and discords of strings, the rattle of music-stands and the oceanic stir of the great auditorium. He would help her off with her coat and the lights would go out, those in the boxes last of all, leaving a hemisphere of silhouettes against the red background.

"It would be wonderful," she said. "Absolutely wonderful— Are you really serious?" she asked him.

"Incipiently serious," he answered. "I thought at one time that it would be pleasant for us to be alone together in the country."

"It is," she said quickly. "I love being with you."

"Yes, I know—I know. But it's dull. It's deadly dull. I shouldn't have kept you at home this year. That was selfish of me. . . ."

"Oh, no, it wasn't. I wanted to stay."

"I should have sent you to France—on some University course—or to a *pension* for girls."

"If you'd sent me to a *pension* for girls, I'd have died. I do wish you wouldn't worry about me. I'm perfectly happy. When would we move to London?"

"Not for a long time," said Fergusson, stretching himself in his arm-chair. "I'd have to find somewhere to live—and then sell Pelling—and get a housekeeper. Moving when you're over sixty is a major act of surgery!" He frowned and added, "I hope you're not going to become impatient, Valerie. I must think it out rather more clearly. What else did Barraclough say?"

Valerie brought him a tray with a syphon of soda and a decanter of whisky.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered. The unfolding film

of her evening at the ballet had stopped in a sudden blackness. "He asked me if I was interested in politics."

"Oh? And what did you tell him?"

"I told him I was passionately keen on politics. And he said, 'Young Liberal?' and I said, 'No—Kropotkin-Anarchist.' "

Fergusson smiled, finished his whisky, and said, "I'm going to bed. Don't stay up too late."

"Daddy," said Valerie.

"Yes?"

She jabbed at a smouldering log with a pair of tongs.

"Is Martin in some kind of trouble?"

"Why do you ask?"

She went and sat in front of him with her hands clasped over her knees.

"I want to know—there's something wrong—anyone can tell that. All this to-ing and fro-ing, and Barraclough probing and questioning. . . . He was over half an hour with you!"

"I was beginning to fear I'd have to ask him to lunch. . . ."

"I wish you had. I would have given him a pork sausage rechauffé with corked claret. Odious man! Why did he . . . ?"

"He's not interested in us, Valerie. He's after Martin."

"But why? What's he done?"

Fergusson didn't answer.

"What *has* he done?" Valerie repeated.

"Quite frankly, Valerie," Fergusson answered, "I don't know. All that I can tell you is that he's in trouble—frightful trouble. And Eleanore's an added complication. If it hadn't been for her—!"

Fergusson shrugged his shoulders. "She's anchored him when he should have been on the high seas, and driven him

into storms when he should have been in harbour. If you can imagine an ideal wife for a diplomat—and then think of the opposite . . ."

And Valerie thought to herself that love is like having a tooth drilled, but the opposite.

"But what has she done in particular?" she asked. "What sort of things? Do please tell me. I'm so anxious to understand."

"Well, it's a sordid story. You can't know, Valerie, how degrading it is for a man—or for a woman, I suppose, for that matter—to have to smile and pretend it's nothing when their spouses are making public exhibitions of themselves. . . ."

"But why can't he *do* something about it?"

"It's no good. You're caught both ways. A man with a wife like Eleanore—if he protests, she'll always get the better of a scene. If he's silent, he's taken for a complaisant husband. And in the end, that's what he becomes. He acquiesces for the sake of—not peace, he never gets that—appeasement. That's it—appeasement. And all he gets is a pair of horns."

"Oh, Daddy, how beastly!"

She looked at her father with distaste.

"I'm sorry, Valerie. But those are the facts. There's no such thing as a dignified *cocu*. Lambert should have kicked her out the first time—with that American. . . ."

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know."

"I'm not going to tell you anything. You asked me."

"I know. I wanted to hear all about Martin. But I can't bear to think of him being connected with anything horrid."

"Well, there it is. We all can imagine ideally how we'd like to live our lives. Heaven knows—I did thirty years ago. I had it all planned out—the men and women I liked, the

wife I wanted, the place where I'd live, the job I'd do and all the books I'd read. And instead, I married three times, and never—I'm sorry to tell you this Valerie—never happily. I've moved during my career in a society of expatriates, refugees and remittance-men. The only job I passionately wanted, I didn't get. And if you look in that case, you'll see that the books on the second shelf are all uncut."

"Martin . . ."

"When you're twenty, you know how you're going to master life. And then, all of a sudden . . ." Fergusson traced the intrusion in the air with his finger. "It's not you who are in control. It's you who are being pushed around . . . 'lashed by invisible spirits.' "

Valerie looked at her father, and he smiled back.

"Goethe," he said in explanation. " 'Lashed by invisible spirits, all we can do is steer the chariot, now right, now left, from the abysses that gape before us' !"

"I don't like that a bit," she said. "I want to feel that . . ."

"I know, Valerie," said Fergusson. "You are perfectly right. Take no notice of my senile despondency. All this grew out of my thoughts on Martin."

"Poor Martin!" said Valerie.

"Don't be too sorry for him," her father said abruptly.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because . . . well, we all create our troubles in our own particular way. And Martin has chosen his particular form of trouble for himself. He should have finished with Eleanore years ago. . . . I would prefer it, Valerie, if you didn't discuss Martin's problems with anyone—and particularly not with him."

"Why?" she asked defensively.

"I don't want you to. . . . It's not suitable. . . . I don't want you to. . . . He's had his youth."

He left the room without bidding her "Good-night."

When her father had closed the door, Valerie, settling herself in the arm-chair in front of the fire, began to read at hazard in the *Anthologie des Poètes Français du XIXème Siècle* which Lambert had given her the day after his arrival. The first line that attracted her attention was:

"J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans. . . ."

She read it aloud, and relished its regrets.

The words were in tune with her mood and she repeated them. But when she began to make her memories more precise, all that she could recall was the dreariness of school and examinations and Miss Fretts and the uncertainties of holidays, disappointments at gymkhanas, the grief when her mother died and the day Lambert walked with her in the walled garden. Her recollections were few, and even those farthest away seemed close and recent and particular.

Having failed in the process of identification, she put the book down and took from the salver on the occasional table a letter, with an Italian stamp, addressed to Lambert. The airmail envelope crinkled in her hand, and she turned it over with pleasure. It was fitting, somehow, that Martin's letter should come from abroad, and be addressed to Inghilterra. "Inghilterra," made England, too, seem a mysterious, romantic place, and she wondered if, seen from Italy, England might be for some people a place of longing and aspiration. Manchester, Swansea, Cirencester, Birmingham, Pelling. It wouldn't do. Genoa, Palermo, Viareggio, Perugia. Those were poems. Like St. Blaise. Like the Zuecca.

"A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise,
A Saint-Blaise.
A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca
Nous étions bien là . . ."

She didn't know where the Zuecca was, but she associated it with Musset and Lambert.

"Mais de vous en souvenir
Prendrez-vous la peine?
Mais de vous en souvenir
Et d'y revenir . . .

Dans les prés fleuris cueillir la verveine?
A Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,
Vivre et mourir là!"

And the thought of the flowering meadows on the Zuecca mingled with her yearning to see Lambert again; and she closed her anthology, listening for the sound of the car as it climbed the hill in second gear, and the click of the first gate.

"Anything else, miss?" said Margaret, closing the window bolts.

"No, nothing at all," said Valerie. "Good-night, Margaret."

"You staying up?" Margaret persisted.

"I'm waiting for Mr. Lambert," Valerie answered.

"I'll wait up if you like, miss," said Margaret.

"No thank you, that's quite all right."

"Thought so!"

"What's that?"

"Nothing, miss."

The telephone had begun to ring in an insistent, agitated peal. Valerie jumped to her feet, but Margaret anticipated her and lifted the receiver.

"Yes," she said. "That's right!"

"Who is it?" Valerie asked at her elbow.

"That's right!" said Margaret into the telephone.

"Who is it?" Valerie asked at her elbow. "Is it Mr. Lambert?"

Margaret, frowning, shook her head and put her hand over the mouthpiece.

"It isn't Mr. Lambert," she said, hissing, "it's someone wants him."

Valerie took the telephone from her hand, and said crisply, "This is Pelling 420—whom do you want?"

The line crackled, and a voice with a foreign intonation asked, "Can Mr. Lambert take a call from Rome?"

"Rome!" she echoed.

"Hello!" the voice repeated. "Is Mr. Lambert available to take a call from Rome?"

And then the voice faded and spoke in Italian before it returned and said, "Is Mr. Lambert available. . . ?"

"No," said Valerie. "I'm fearfully sorry. Mr. Lambert isn't here. . . . Can I take a message?" She turned to Margaret and said, "Don't bother to wait, Margaret."

Margaret left the room, talking to herself.

"One moment please," said the voice. "Rome. Rome. Hello, Rome. Don't go away Pelling. . . . Hello, Rome . . ."

"Hello," said Valerie. She sat on the table and waited, with her heart thumping, for the reply. She had never spoken on a continental trunk call before.

"Hello, Pelling," the voice said. "Here it is!"

A woman's voice, calm and low-pitched and English followed.

"Is that Pelling 420?"

"Yes," said Valerie. "Who's speaking?"

"This is Eleanore Lambert."

Valerie smoothed her hair from her face, and said, "Good-evening, this is Valerie Fergusson. Can I help you?"

"I wanted to talk to my husband."

"He isn't here, I'm afraid," Valerie answered. Across the telephone wire, from hundreds of miles away, the momentary stop in Eleanore's breathing, followed by the

quickening in her voice, gave Valerie a sense of victory. She slid from the table into the arm-chair, at ease now and ready to prolong the conversation. She hated Eleanore's cold, insolent voice, pursuing her husband across Europe, searching him out in possessive self-assurance into the very room where he had found refuge.

"Could you tell me when he'll be available?" Eleanore's voice was controlled and patient.

"I'm afraid I couldn't tell you," Valerie said calmly. "He left this morning . . ."

"Left?"

". . . and he didn't say when he was coming back."

"I see."

There was a pause, and Valerie listened to Eleanore's breathing at the other end of the line. She had the feeling that if Eleanore were to put the instrument to her breast like a stethoscope, she would hear a quaver. Eleanore spoke more slowly: "Has he gone back to London?"

"I really . . ." Valerie began, and the telephone went dead. "Hello!" she called. "Hello!" and getting no answer, replaced the receiver.

"Here, Fausto!" she said to the setter, stretched, somnolent in front of the fire. The dog rose obediently, shook itself, and sauntered towards her with an idle stirring of its tail.

"How strange!" Valerie said to herself. "How very strange!"

She fondled the dog's ears, and visualised the face, familiar from the *Tatler* photograph, that had so often eyed her when she had looked at Martin's picture in her drawer. She imagined her, chill in her anger, frustrated by her failure to reach Martin, indignant at the interruption in her call, flicking the receiver and rebuking the operator. A few seconds later the telephone rang again and Valerie watched

the inert ivory-coloured instrument as the bell rang and echoed and rang and echoed. If it rang ten times, she would pick it up. Seven—pause—eight—pause—nine—pause—ten—pause—eleven . . . She raised the receiver and said, "Pelling 420."

"Hold on, please. . . . You were cut off," said the operator's voice, distant, ebbing and strengthening. "You're through now."

"Hello . . . we were cut off," Eleanore's voice had become thick. "Are you there?" she added anxiously.

"Yes, I'm here," said Valerie. Fausto had climbed onto her lap, spreading himself grandly in sleep, and she rested the telephone on his spine.

"Could you tell me when Mr. Lambert will be back?" Eleanore asked. Her voice was imperative, and Valerie answered brusquely:

"I'm sorry, I've no idea. Not for a few months—I shouldn't think."

There was a pause.

"Has he gone to London?"

"I couldn't say."

"Is your father at home?"

"Yes."

"May I speak to him?"

"I'm sorry—he's gone to bed. He never speaks on the telephone after ten. . . . Have you tried Mr. Lambert's flat?"

Eleanore didn't answer, and Valerie waited for her to speak.

"If Mr. Lambert rings," she said at last, "—oh, never mind."

"Is there any message?"

"No. Nothing." Her voice faded. "Thank you very much. . . . I hope I haven't disturbed your father."

"Oh, no," said Valerie. "He sleeps like a log."

She heard the receiver in Rome fall gently onto its pedestal, and simultaneously she pushed Fausto onto the floor. Then she took the letter from the salver, switched off all the lights except those in the hall and at the posterngate, unlatched the entrance-door, and ran at top speed up the stairs to her room. As soon as she got inside, she turned on the lamp, bolted the door and flung herself face downwards on the bed, clutching the crumpled letter beneath her. Again the poignant surge of pleasure and she squeezed her eyes tightly in the enclosing night of her pillow. "Could you tell me when Mr. Lambert will be back?" "I'm sorry, I've no idea." She could hear Eleanore's voice, and repeated the answer. It wasn't a lie; it was a half-lie—a half-lie to protect Martin. "Could you tell me when Mr. Lambert will be back?" "Not for a few months." That was a lie. Not for months, not for years, not for ages. *Never* for you. It would have been better if he'd left her years ago. Her father had said so. Gradually, her breathing became normal, and she looked out from the pillow with one eye as if she expected to find someone observing her in the room itself.

She climbed from the bed and drew the curtain. Everything was quiet, the woods, the fields, the isolated cottages at the approach to the village, and the two gates, barely visible in the flush of light from her father's window. She waited for a few minutes, staring down the road towards the canal, till, suddenly, with a shiver, she threw the envelope onto the table, and began to brush her hair.

The handwriting was firm and square-shaped. From the start she had thought it was from Eleanore, and now that she had spoken to her in Rome, Valerie was certain. Martin Lambert. She imagined Eleanore writing the name, not as

the designation of a stranger, but as her title to his possession. Long ago—two years ago—she herself had written to Lambert when he had sent her an illustrated copy of *Mansfield Park*. (She moved the lamp so that it threw deep shadows under her chin, and nose and eyes, and she brushed her hair back at the sides behind her ear, wondering whether he would prefer it if she had it cut short.)

"Dear Mr. Lambert," she had written. And before she sent it, she copied it out three times, and showed the final draft to her father. "Dear Mr. Lambert, It was so very kind of you to send me *Mansfield Park*. Jane Austen is my favourite author. I had all her novels with the exception of *Mansfield Park,* and I am looking forward most awfully to reading it. I believe they are 'doing it' "—she was proud of the inverted commas around 'doing it'—"for advanced.

Daddy and I both hope you will soon come and see us again.

Yours sincerely,
Valerie Fergusson."

And for weeks, till she returned to school, she had watched the post each day in the hope that somehow the book and her letter marked the beginning of a prolonged correspondence. But nothing happened. Out of habit she looked each morning in the post for his handwriting, sometimes asking her father, usually without success, about Lambert—where he was, when he would come again, what he was doing.

After she had brushed her hair, she smeared her face with a complexion-food which she had bought by post from an advertiser in *Beauty*. She rubbed the cream in with her finger-tips, clockwise and counter-clockwise as instructed, till her cheeks glowed with grease. Her inspection of her

shining face displeased her, and she dried it with paper-tissues, and hastily covered the glistening surface with powder.

"Now," she said to her reflection, "you look like a ghost."

It was past eleven, and while waiting for Lambert, she decided that she would write him a letter. To begin with, she tried the door in order to make sure that it was locked. Then she took off her blouse and skirt, and put on her blue dressing gown that hung behind the door. As if performing a rite, she placed her hairbrushes on the right-hand side of the table and her pots of cream and lotions on the left. From the top drawer, she took out a writing-pad and her fountain-pen, thought for a few moments, and wrote without pause till she had finished.

"Dear darling Martin, darling, darling Martin, I am writing this to you in my bedroom. Everyone has gone to sleep, and I am waiting for you to come back. I am writing this to tell you that all day long I've been longing and yearning to see you again. Ever since you came here last, I have woken up every day and wondered if by some wonderful miracle you would come back again. When I saw you, I could hardly speak and wanted to sit down. And you were just as I remembered you when you walked with me and gave me the wistaria from the bush.

Darling Martin, I know all this sounds terribly, terribly silly, but I have to write you this so that you will know that I love you. You will think perhaps that I do not know my mind. Oh, Martin, please, please, please believe that I do. I have thought and thought of you for years, and remembered how it was when you held my hand when we walked in the garden. It was exactly the same when you held my hand in the library, and whatever happens, dearest, dearest Martin, I want you to know that I could never feel for any-

one what I feel for you. I love you, and I will never love anyone else in the world but you. I know that you may think this letter stupid and schoolgirlish, but I can't help it. I do so want you to know what an awful ache I have when you are not here, and how when you come back, everything is well again.

And sometimes I wish that the whole world hated you so that I could be the only one in the world who loved you. This morning Colonel Barraclough asked me all sorts of questions and wanted me to tell him what I thought about you. And I wanted to tell him that you are the most wonderful person in the world and that I loved you. But I didn't tell him that. I only said that I thought you were very nice. I know that you are in great trouble. Daddy told me. I don't care what it is all about. I would love you if you were a murderer.

Dear, dear, darling Martin, I send you all my love."

She tightened the belt of her dressing gown, and leaning over the page again, signed it, "Valerie." Having done so, she gathered up the six blue pages of her writing-paper, read the letter slowly again, folded it in two, and then carefully tore it into tiny pieces that she heaped together in a large, glass ashtray. A fragment fell fluttering to the ground, and she gathered it up. Written on it were the words "love you if," and she tore it horizontally so that the letters were finally disfigured, before placing the confetti in the tray.

For the next five minutes, she burnt the pieces, lighting match after match, till the pyre turned to ash, and her letter was obliterated.

Valerie lay in the dark with her eyes wide open, waiting for the sweep of headlights across the room, the sound of crushed gravel and the slam of the motor-car door. To resist

the tidal drag of sleep, she had placed her bare arm, martyred by the cold night air, on the counterpane. If he asked her whether there had been any telephone calls for him, she would say "No." Eleanore had abused his kindness and forbearance and smudged his prospect of happiness. And she, herself, had merely defended him against his inability to wound even people like Eleanore who tried to destroy him.

She drew her chilled hand under the covers and warmed it against her body. She wondered what Eleanore had wanted. Only to worry and harass him—of that she was certain. Perhaps if he knew, he'd be angry. The surge of defiance was followed by a sinking into doubt. Perhaps Eleanore had wanted to tell him something for his benefit. But that was impossible. Her father had described Eleanore as an incubus. "She's got her claws into him," he had said, "and won't let him go. She doesn't want anyone else to have him. She's the sort of woman who can only enjoy being unfaithful to her husband when she's on good terms with him."

She hated her father when he spoke like that; and yet it was true. Why didn't Eleanore leave Martin alone? Why?

Her doubt was replaced by triumph. She was glad she'd told Eleanore that Martin couldn't be reached. She gazed around at the room, now mottled with moonlight, and her glance rested on the airmail envelope, a shadow on the glittering top of her dressing table. She wished she could know exactly what Martin and Eleanore signified to each other. How could anyone know the truth, the real truth, the private truth, the pillow-truth—that was it, the pillow-truth when the door is locked and your face is shut in the pillow and you confess the truth to yourself?

She got out of bed, put on her dressing gown, and went

to the window. The hills and pond were lit with a steel-blue light, and the village was fringed with a greyish penumbra of meadows. After looking out for several minutes, Valerie drew the curtains again, switched on the dressing-table lamp and began to brush her hair again, determined to keep awake till Lambert returned. Tired, at last, of the repetitive strokes, she put down the brush and picked up the letter, and began to wonder idly if it was a long letter or a short note. She felt it, and pressed its upper and lower edges till it bulged convexly, and the sealed flap split a little in the right-hand corner. A twitch of excitement passed through her body, and she held the envelope to the light.

With the back of the comb, she began to ease open the envelope. The twitch changed to an agonising sense of guilt and shame. The flap yielded, and she pressed the comb harder against the adhesive. The envelope tore, the distance of about half an inch. Desperately, like someone surrendering to a resisted vice, she tore the whole flap away from the envelope and fumbled the sheet of paper from its pouch. Her hands were shaking violently and she put the letter on the table, and rested her hot face in the palms of her hands as she read.

"Martin dear,

You will probably be surprised to get this letter from Rome—surprised, that is, if it reaches you before I 'phone. I left Bandol last Wednesday, and flew here from Nice. Dr. Fourneaux told me I could have gone several weeks ago, but I wanted to be sure that everything was all right. I paid him the £200 that you sent me, and explained to him that you were getting permission from the Treasury to send him the balance. He was very kind and helpful, and re-

assuring. It was his idea that I should go to Rome for a few weeks before going home, and I am writing this from the Hotel Regina. I'm sorry to worry you with something very practical, but if you could send me, say, £100, it would be a great help.

I am feeling so much better. I don't see anyone, and don't want to. Yesterday, I went by train to Ostia and swam and lay on the beach and thought and thought about us, Martin, wondering what went wrong . . ."

Valerie turned the page over with her finger-tips as if by that delicacy she might minimise her offence.

". . . and how it was that our love and happiness came to ruin when it had all been so lovely and perfect.

The leaves are falling in the Pincio Gardens, but the sun is still hot. I walked this morning down the alley-way of statues that you liked so much, and remembered the first time we were together in Rome. And I wished I could tear away all the years and the happenings that have come between us. I wished I could ask your pardon," a few words were crossed out here, "the many wrongs that I have done you in the last few years, and that you perhaps—since you are proud and stubborn, might think that it wasn't all my fault—not all—and that you too might have had some part in the unhappiness we shared.

I went to the children's fountain by the cypress trees, and watched them playing, and knew then I was cured. Because all I felt was affection and love and warmth.

When I telephone you, I want to ask you, Martin, to let me come home. Please, please, darling Martin, let me come home. I'm so tired of nursing-homes and hotels. I want to be with you again, and to wake up at last from all my nightmares.

And if I end this letter by saying that I love you, don't

look cold and hostile. I love you, Martin. And that is the only truth.

Eleanore."

Valerie finished reading the letter, and stared at her image in the looking-glass.

"What an awful thing to have done!" she said aloud. "How terrible!"

Hearing the rattle of the first gate being unlatched, she switched off the light, stuffed the letter into the top drawer, and leapt into bed, still wearing her dressing gown. There she lay listening to the sequence of the sounds of Lambert's arrival.

"I feel sick," she said to herself, and soon afterwards fell asleep.

XI

THE CLANK AND scrape of a shovel on the stone terrace, mingled with a hiss of scattering sand, woke Valerie at half past eight. For a few seconds, she lay looking at the opaque traceries of frost on the window, at ease in the thought that Lambert had returned and that she was now delivered from her anxieties of the evening before. Her tweed dress, spread over an arm-chair, and her suit with the green velvet collar, hanging outside the wardrobe, were the alternatives in the insistent question of which would please him more. She visualised herself in each, and rejected the dress because he had seen her in it twice already.

"Hello, Caz," she called out from the window to the Polish tractor-driver. "What's it like?"

He stopped shovelling the sand from his wheelbarrow, bowed and said, his breath making patterns in the crisp air, "Very icy, Miss Valerie. Glassy. You must be careful."

He waved in the direction of the sun that divided the landscape into two sections, one where its rays had dispersed the morning mist and remained corruscating over the green, and the other enclosing the woods in a thin haze.

"It will be very beautiful today," he said.

"Yes, it's going to be lovely," Valerie replied. She wanted to be bathed and dressed so that she could see Lambert as soon as possible. But when she glimpsed the letter from Italy

in her half-open drawer, she closed it hastily and waited for minutes before she dared open it to take out her hair-brushes.

"Have you seen Mr. Lambert?" she asked Margaret.

"In his room," the maid replied.

"No, he isn't there," said Valerie. "I looked."

"I suppose you would," said Margaret, laying the table.

"Has he had breakfast?" Valerie asked.

"Not here he hasn't," said Margaret. "He was sulky, like, this morning. Read the papers, and left them all over the room. You want your breakfast?"

"No. Do you know if he went out?"

"How would I know?" Margaret answered, her small eyes indifferent. "Meals are all times here. . . ."

"He must have gone out," said Valerie. She went towards the door, and Margaret called after her, "What about your breakfast? I can't stand over the gas-stove all day."

Mumbling to herself, she began to prepare the tray for Fergusson's breakfast in bed.

"I brought you some apples, miss," said the tractor-driver, bowing as Valerie stood on the stone steps looking anxiously across the fields. She didn't answer, and he repeated, "Some apples, miss. I picked them for you in the orchard."

He took the heavy basket that hung from a handle of his wheelbarrow, and gave it to her.

"Oh—yes—thanks awfully," she said, putting the basket on the top step. "Have you seen Mr. Lambert?"

Disappointed by her casual reception of his gift, the Pole bowed again, and said stiffly, "I saw him ten minutes ago. He had your father's gun."

"My father's gun? What do you mean?"

"He was going shooting."

Again she scanned the brown and green landscape, straining her eyes in the direction of the mist.

"Did he say where he was going, Caz? What did he say to you?"

He had begun again to scatter sand over the icy terrace in slow sweeps like a scytheman.

"He didn't tell me where he was going," he answered without looking at her. "He didn't speak to me. Here I am only a tractor-driver. In Poland . . ."

But she had already hurried down to the iron fence bounding the gravel drive from the first field.

"Martin!" she called. "Martin!"

She climbed the bars, and began to walk over the frost-hardened clods of the field towards the copse just visible above the horizon. She walked gingerly, wishing that she had been wearing lower heels.

"Martin!" she called. "Martin!" Her voice carried lightly over the slopes of the fields without reply, and a beginning of anxiety quickened her step. Sometimes her father used to go rabbiting in Piper's wood, and she decided that he had probably spoken to Lambert about it, and that Lambert would follow the footpath that bordered the third meadow. But first she had to cross a soggy field of stubble, and the instep of her right shoe became clotted with a wedge of mud and squelched with each step that she took.

"Martin!" she called towards the copse. "Martin!" and like a false echo, she heard her own name relayed by the tractor-driver from Margaret on the steps of the house: "Valer-ie! Miss Valer-ie!"

She began to run, driven on by the image of the gun, the precise centre of an amorphous fear. Suddenly, the reason why Martin had taken the gun had become clear to her. Not for rabbiting. Not for sport. Not for pleasure. But for

something unspeakably horrible. Her feet sank into a rut and she tripped and sank on one knee, tearing her stocking. She picked herself up and started running down the slippery grass field towards the birch copse that sprawled like a black and silver promontory into the fields.

"Martin!" she called again. "Martin! Martin! Martin!"

She had taken his letter. She had prevented him from talking to his wife. She had lied and lied and lied. Martin! She said to herself as she ran, "Please, God; please, God; please, God. Please let him not do anything to himself, and I'll tell him everything and beg his forgiveness, and never, never do anything like it again. Never." And the image of a hideous, bloody mess like the head of a rabbit blasted by a shotgun drove her on.

"Martin!" she tried to call, but only a strange mew came from her constricted throat, unfamiliar, terrifying. She had begun to weep, and the wind smeared her tears over her face. She fell again, and this time, lay with grass and earth pressed against her face waiting for the sound of a shot. "Please, God, no," she said. "Please—no."

She could see the gun on its bracket which she had observed a thousand times with indifference. She remembered her father cleaning it. And the gun itself became personal and hateful in her memory. Everything connected with it, including her father, seemed hateful. And she remembered the day she had told Lambert that her father had cleaned the gun for him; and that she too was guilty.

She got up and began to run, hobbling across the last field that led to the wood. Her leg was hurting; all she could see was the blur of the trees; and the wind caked the mud on her hands into a hard clay.

"Martin!" she called. "Martin!"

When she was about thirty yards from the copse, a single shot, abrupt and brutal, exploded in the air, accompanied

by a tumult of birds disturbed from the trees. The echoes vibrated like the sounds of a broken string till they settled and faded in silence. Valerie stopped, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and said, "Oh, God!" She took her glasses from her pocket, put them on, and began to walk slowly towards the spur of the wood.

At that moment, Fausto came leaping across the grass, followed by Lambert with the gun under his arm.

"Hello, Valerie," said Lambert. "I've been firing a salute."

She took off her glasses and said, without looking at him, "Hello, Martin. I came to tell you—breakfast's ready. Get down, Fausto!"

Lambert stood in front of her and said, observing the mud on her suit and the drying tears on her face, "I missed."

She looked down at the wet leaves, and said, "I suppose you're out of practice. I didn't mean to disturb you."

"I'm not out of practice," said Lambert, taking her arm, and walking around the wood, away from the house. "I always miss. The only reason I shoot is because I like the noise it makes."

"That's what I loathe," said Valerie. "It's so irrevocable. First of all, there's silence. Then there's a frightful bang. And then you wait. . . . It's done. . . ."

"I know," said Lambert. "Nothing left but to pick up the feathers. Why've you been crying?"

He stopped, and stacked his gun against the fence. Valerie turned her face away from him, as he stood in front of her.

"I haven't been," she said.

"Yes, you have. . . ."

"I haven't been. For heaven's sake . . ."

Her nose and her forehead reddened, and her eyelids swam in tears as if they had been submerged in an eye-bath. Lambert waited for her to continue.

"I'm not crying," she said. "I got something in my eye when I was running. And don't stand there looking sadistic."

"What's wrong, Valerie?" he asked her.

She turned her back to him and burst into sobs, articulate and anguished. Lambert stood watching the back of her neck and her quivering shoulders, and, at last, put his hands beneath her elbows, and said, "Tell me what it's about."

Her weeping gradually stopped, and she turned to him and said, "Oh, Martin, I'm so unhappy—so terribly unhappy."

"Why?" he asked, and passed his fingers over her face and through her hair behind her ear.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm unhappy about everything—about father and myself . . ."

"Why are you unhappy about him?"

"It's because he's so lonely and old and unhappy. And there's nothing I can do to help him except be with him—and I can't do that always. . . . He's so old and pathetic."

"I thought you liked it here. You once told me . . ."

"I know I did. But it isn't true. I hate it. I can almost hear the years sounding like a clock. It's a beastly feeling. . . ."

"What else are you unhappy about?"

"I'm unhappy about myself."

"Why?"

"I just think I'm loathesome."

He lifted her chin to look into her face, but she wriggled it out of his hand.

"What particular loathesome acts have you performed lately?" he asked.

"Oh, all kinds," she said, and wiped her nose. "Tell me, Martin. If I were to do something very terrible . . ."

"Murder?"

"No, don't be silly. If I were to steal something, say, would you forgive me?"

"Of course I would. What have you stolen?"

"Nothing. . . . Would you forgive me if I did anything—?"

"Almost anything."

"What wouldn't you forgive?"

Leaning on the fence, with his hands forming an enclosure around Valerie, he thought for a few seconds and said, "I don't think I could forgive anyone—not even you—who betrayed me."

"Betrayed," she repeated, looking over his shoulder at the sunlit fields. "What an old-fashioned word! What do you mean by it?"

Lambert drew away from her. "I mean," he said, "that human relations are based on trust. It makes people predictable. If they betray one person's trust they betray everyone."

"I don't know," Valerie said slowly. "You always need two people to establish trust. And each person tries to interpret in his own way the meaning of that trust. It's private. It's got nothing to do with society. It's personal. . . . The only true judges of treachery are the people concerned."

Valerie looked straight into Lambert's eyes, and went on, "For example . . . if father knew I was standing here talking to you like this . . . he'd think I was breaking his trust in me."

Lambert took her face in his hands.

"It's innocuous. Isn't it?"

Valerie looked back at him. "I don't know," she said. "Daddy wouldn't think so. But you see—I don't think I'm breaking my faith with him. I think I know—I'm sure I know that basically he wants my happiness. And what my

happiness is—I know far better than he does."

Lambert leaned back against the fence, drew her towards him, and spoke to her with her face against his.

"Would you—" he asked her, "would you leave your father—even if it made him unhappy?"

She thought for a few moments, and then said, "Yes. I'd leave him if I loved someone . . . and if I felt it was important and lasting. Is that a terrible thing to say?"

"No, I'm sure that's right!" said Lambert. "Your father's had his youth."

"That sounds like a quotation," said Valerie. "Daddy said it about someone else. . . . But anyhow—we've all had our youth. Me, too. We all had it when the hydrogen bomb was invented. There aren't any young people any more. We've all become equally old, waiting for the bang."

"You look very young for an old lady," said Lambert.

"Don't jeer at me, and don't be silly," said Valerie. "You've all made a mess of things . . ."

"Who have?"

"You have . . . all of you. Daddy. The Prime Minister. Everyone. The people who could have done things after the war. And when we tell you it's your fault, you hide behind a kind of cynicism. . . . There aren't any young or old any more. Really not! There are only the ignorant and the informed."

"The happy and the unhappy. Which are you?"

"Neither. I'm just hovering. I've been trying to make my father happy."

Lambert shrugged his shoulders.

"Your father's an intelligent and moderately unselfish man. He wouldn't want to feed on your kindness merely because his own life went wrong!"

"He isn't moderately unselfish," said Valerie. "He's very selfish—and not very understanding."

"What would he say," Lambert asked, kissing her in front of her ear, "if you were to tell him that we were going for a month to Italy together?"

"We?"

"Yes—you and I."

Her eyes became bright with delight.

"He'd have a fit," she said.

"Well, say—" said Lambert, and he kissed her from the lobe of her ear to the corner of her mouth. "Do you like that?"

"Yes," she said, and the smile ebbed from her face.

"Say you were to tell him," said Lambert, "that you wanted to learn Italian—without telling him about me? How would he like that?"

"I don't know . . . I hadn't thought of . . ."

"No, I know. It's my idea. What do you think of it?"

She had closed her eyes, and now opened them.

"I think it's a wonderful idea," she said. "Absolutely wonderful!"

"Perhaps you could stay there for several months . . ."

"Where would we stay?" she asked.

"I don't know, somewhere in Rome."

"No," she said quickly, and pushed him away. "Not Rome. Anywhere else. But not Rome."

"Why not? Have you ever been there?"

"No. Don't ask me why I don't want to go to Rome. I just don't."

"All right," he said, drawing her back to him. "Not Rome. What about Paris?"

"Yes . . . please," she said, and the pleasure returned to her face. "Please!"

He took her arm, and went with her into the wood.

"Tell me, Martin," she said after they had walked for a few moments in silence. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Why?"

"Daddy says you're in trouble about something."

He stopped by a thick beech tree, propped his gun against it, and took her hands in his.

"He's quite right," he said with a shrug. "I am in trouble." He kicked a fallen branch with his toe, and said, "I've resigned from the F.O. . . . I wasn't joking before. Not about myself. I'm going away. . . ."

"But you were joking about me—when you asked me?"

"Half-joking," said Lambert. "It was a phantasy—a sort of dream."

He put his arm around her, and she spoke with her face against his jacket without looking up.

"If you go away," she said, "I want to go with you. Please, Martin . . . please. I wouldn't be a nuisance. I swear to you I wouldn't. I'd—"

"What about your father?"

"I can't help that. Everyone has a right to be happy. Why should I always, always, always sacrifice myself for him? He's never done anything for me. It's all a pretence."

"And my wife?"

"Your wife . . . ?" She hesitated, and said, "I'm sorry for her, very sorry. But she had her chance to make you happy. She did, didn't she? And she didn't take it . . ."

He kissed her mouth before she finished her sentence. She kissed him with her lips closed and her eyes open and examining.

"Miss Valerie," came the voice of the tractor-driver, approaching. "Breakfast. Margaret says breakfast."

"Coming, Caz," she called back. "Coming!"

When they emerged from the other side of the copse, the Pole saw them and turned back to the house with Fausto bounding after him.

"Well, what did you get, Martin?" said Fergusson who was waiting for them in the breakfast-room.

"Nothing," said Lambert. "Your daughter got in my line of fire."

Fergusson patted her elbow. It was a favourite gesture of his when he was pleased with her.

"Thank you for your forbearance," he said. "I wouldn't have liked you to have hit my daughter."

"Don't worry, Daddy," said Valerie, offering Lambert the toast-rack. "He would have missed."

Fergusson laughed, and helped himself to coffee.

"You shouldn't, Daddy," said Valerie.

"I know," said Fergusson. "But I like it. I'm feeling very well today. . . . What a glorious day! . . . How would you two like to come to the races?"

"Wonderful idea!" said Lambert.

"Marvellous!" said Valerie.

"You see," said Fergusson, "we have to go to London the day after tomorrow."

Valerie stopped eating, and said, "I didn't know, Daddy."

"No, of course you didn't," said Fergusson, filling his pipe. "I only decided this morning. I thought we'd look round at some places, and see if we couldn't arrange some coaching for you before you go up."

Lambert looked across the table at Fergusson who smiled back and offered him a cigarette from the bird's-eye maple box.

"I wouldn't like to interfere with your arrangements, John," he said. "Are you sure you don't want to leave earlier? My own arrangements are very—" he hesitated for the word, "very adaptable."

"I know," said Fergusson. "I know. You haven't seen the papers this morning?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "But I don't give a damn what the papers say. . . ."

"There's quite a lot about him this morning—pictures,

too," Fergusson said to Valerie.

"Let me see," she said. She picked up the swath of newspapers from the arm-chair and shuffled the front pages.

"Good lord!" she said suddenly. "Look at this picture of Martin. It's practically the whole page. And look at the headline!"

Lambert took the paper, as if indifferently, from her hands, and read the thick banner headline. "F.O. MAN SUSPENDED."

"Are they all like that?" Valerie asked him.

"Pretty well—with variants according to style—F.O. man, diplomat, diplomatist, Foreign Office official . . ."

"How sickening!" said Valerie.

"Are you quite sure," Lambert asked Fergusson, "that I'm not embarrassing you by my presence?"

"Certainly not!" Fergusson said quickly. "We like a little excitement, don't we, Valerie?"

"Yes—love it," she said.

"There were a few telephone calls for you," said Fergusson. Valerie waited anxiously for his next sentence. "The press, you know," he went on. "I shunted them off."

"Thank you so much. I'd rather not talk to the press—not yet, at any rate. I'm probably going away."

"Where to?"

"I'm not quite sure. Rome or somewhere . . ."

"Oh, but you said you wouldn't go to Rome!" Valerie said quickly. "You know you did, Martin."

Her father didn't interrupt the rhythmic puffs of his pipe, but he said, "Don't agitate yourself, Valerie. Rome or Madrid—or Paris—they all—have the same—value—as retreats. Have you cleared everything up, Martin?"

"I've got nothing to clear," said Lambert. "I've sent a report to the P.M. and to Baggott. They've been through my flat—ransacked the whole place—and they're welcome

to what they've got. I've got nothing to hide and nothing to clear up. When I go—if I may, I'll leave you my address abroad. Are you likely to be in France—or Italy—this year?"

"I don't think so," said Fergusson. "I don't think so."

"But perhaps I will be," said Valerie. "I'd love to go to one of those courses at Pau or the Sorbonne—or somewhere like that. Do you think I might?" she asked her father. "It would be terribly useful if I could spend a month or two in France before I go to Oxford. Do say 'yes,' Daddy?"

Fergusson smiled to Lambert.

"What an exquisite age, Martin!" he said. "To think that there was ever a time when our only problems were—Pau or the Sorbonne? What do you think? Should I let her go?"

"I don't know," said Lambert, cautiously. "At any rate, I wouldn't recommend Pau in the autumn and winter. I'm not even sure if they have courses . . ."

"I don't specially want to go to Pau," said Valerie. "I'd settle for Paris—the Sorbonne. I simply yearn to go to the Sorbonne. . . . Do say 'yes,' Daddy. It's a wonderful idea."

"I'll have to discuss it further with Martin," said Fergusson like a magistrate reserving judgment. "I'm not sure that I can expose you to the depredations of the resident Frenchmen."

"But, Daddy," Valerie protested, "I thought you were a Francophile. . . ."

"Not to that extent," said Fergusson. "What about the races this afternoon?"

"Lovely!" said Valerie. "What car shall we take? Can I drive?"

"I'll take my car if you like," said Lambert.

"All right," said Fergusson. "And Valerie can pack a picnic." He became lively at the prospect. "Tell Caz to get up two bottles of Chambertin 'Forty-five. And see if you can

have a chicken done in time."

"Yes, Daddy," said Valerie, and ran out of the room, looking for Margaret.

Fergusson turned over the pile of newspapers before speaking. At last, he said, "You know the Rond Point des Champs Elysées?"

"Yes," said Lambert.

"Well, not far from there is a place called Le Beaujeu, near the Marigny Theatre . . ."

Lambert waited for him to continue.

"When you're next in Paris," Fergusson went on, "you must try their *crudités,* Sauce Bagnarotte—delicious—and their steak *au poivre*—most excellent. Pleasant place—apart from the actors and dressmakers."

"Would you like me to leave today, John?" Lambert asked, standing. "I don't want to inconvenience you—I told you."

Fergusson averted his glance. "No, I don't want you to go—but you will understand—I don't want Valerie to become distressed—or anything like that."

"I see," said Lambert. "I understand. I'll leave tonight."

"No, not tonight," said Fergusson. "Why not tomorrow—that's it—tomorrow!"

He sat down in the arm-chair, and began gently to massage his chest.

"Are you all right?" Lambert asked. He had turned to go, but now paused at the door.

Fergusson waved him away. "I'm all right—I'm all right." With two fingers he fumbled in his pocket for a pill.

In the hall, Lambert was greeted by Margaret.

"Two men to see you," she said.

"Where?"

"In the study. They said you wasn't to hurry."

XII

WHITE WITH PALE freckles, the bald head over the incessantly writing hand was itself like a featureless, anonymous face. Barraclough had announced his name, and he had nodded. Since then, he had been silent, writing without looking up from his pad that he had rested on an oak coffee-table.

"Leave it for a moment, Tom," Barraclough said. And Lambert saw the flickering pen stop, arrested by the order, while the pallid scalp still brooded over the paper.

"I don't know whether you've heard about Sparr-Gamby," said Barraclough, propping his elbows on his knees.

"No. What about him?" Lambert asked.

"They're taking him in—this morning," said Barraclough. "Pity. They'll confuse the whole situation."

Lambert began to laugh, quietly at first and then more loudly, till at last, uncontrollably, he went to the window and stood there, gasping with laughter, while Barraclough watched him gravely.

"What's the joke?" he said when Lambert's laughter had subsided into helpless exhaustion.

"It's so bloody funny," said Lambert, taking his seat. "So bloody funny!"

"It's very funny," said Barraclough. "The F.O. is very attached to its prejudices."

"What have they got him for?" Lambert asked. "Handing over the Brangwyn Report?"

"That's in reserve," said Barraclough. "They're holding him for something else—*affaire de moeurs . . .*"

"You mean that Earl's Court business last year?"

"Something of that kind."

"But it was all dealt with in the Office."

Barraclough stretched himself, and yawned.

"Left London at seven this morning . . . yes, it's all old stuff . . . but somebody wanted action before tomorrow. . . . Where were we, Tom?"

Without raising his head, the shorthand-writer said, in a monotone, " '*Barraclough:* Now tell me, Lambert, what did you do when you returned from Italy? *Lambert:* I was at the Foreign Office for a few months, and then I was transferred to the United States.' "

"Yes," said Barraclough reflectively. "Yes. You enjoyed your stay in America."

"On the whole—yes," said Lambert.

"New York, Washington, Chicago—you were posted to all three in turn?"

"Yes."

"And you had many friends there."

"Yes. Very many."

"Your wife was with you?"

"Yes. The whole time."

"But you had to travel quite a bit—lectures, broadcasts, talks, receptions, dinners—that kind of thing."

"Yes. I did all that—it was part of my duties."

Barraclough raised his hand.

"My dear Lambert," he said, "don't apologise. These aren't imputations. I merely want a picture, for the record,

of your life in America."

"What's that got to do with—the subject of your inquiry?"

Barraclough answered curtly, "Perhaps you'll leave me to answer that. . . . Tell me something about Augier. When did you first meet him?"

"I've known him on and off for a long time. I've seen him quite a bit in London."

"I'm not asking you that. I'm asking when you first met him."

Lambert thought for a moment, and said, "I first met him in New York, in May, 1946."

"Good," said Barraclough. "Have you got that, Tom?"

The bald head jerked.

"Now, tell me, Lambert," said Barraclough. "On what sort of terms were you with Augier?"

Lambert picked up a magazine, fluttered the pages and put it down again.

"I knew him as a journalist. My job was to be a sort of high-level public relations man—I had to keep on good terms with anyone who might influence opinion—and Augier was a useful person to know."

"How useful?"

"How useful? . . . Well, he was in contact with his own Embassy—with the U.N. delegations—with a swarm of people who wouldn't confide in an Englishman for one reason or another."

"Yes. And he, no doubt, found you useful."

"Yes. He must have."

"Of course he did. And very properly. It was your job, wasn't it, to feed the press with news and opinion about Britain?"

"Interpretation, chiefly. It wasn't my job to give out hard news."

"No, quite clearly," said Barraclough in friendly agreement. "Your position was more important than that. But—say, two or three times—when Augier wanted information—he did ring you, didn't he?"

Lambert looked back at Barraclough's smiling face, and said, "What sort of information?"

"Oh, perfectly respectable stuff about Bretton Woods, GATT and that kind of thing . . ."

"Yes, I habitually gave the press—including Augier—whatever I could."

"I see," said Barraclough. "You gave them—very properly—background information. . . . Well, let's have a look at something else. This fellow Augier . . . he had a flat—an apartment, I suppose it's called—looking over Central Park."

Lambert made no comment.

"It was, I imagine, like his London flat," Barraclough went on.

"Augier was a very hospitable person," said Lambert. "He was always having people in for drinks."

"Yes," said Barraclough, examining a schedule in front of him. "I have a list of his guests."

"Have you been burgling him as well?" asked Lambert.

"Oh, yes," said Barraclough—the wavering pen had paused—"but this lot's from America. You see, your friend Augier made a business of friendship. He had all his friends card-indexed—professions, beauty, connections, wealth. It was all there. Didn't you notice how nicely cooked his parties were—all the ingredients in due proportion—tycoons, actresses, lawyers, bishops?"

"I never gave it a thought. Most parties in America are carefully composed."

"That may be," said Barraclough. "But I would have thought you might have paid special attention to Augier's

parties. In 1951, during May—you were at his flat on the seventeenth, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-seventh and the thirtieth. In June and July, you were with him . . ."

"You needn't go through the statistics," said Lambert. "I will assume that you've read my diaries with due care and attention. What are you trying to prove?"

"For the moment, I am only trying to establish this—that you know Augier well—that you've known him for years—that you've both been in the habit of doing each other favours. . . ."

"And then?"

"And then—I think you may agree with me that the explanation of how you came to give the Brangwyn Report to Augier is a simple one—a very simple one . . ."

There was a knock at the door, and Margaret came in, wiping her hands.

"Any of you want coffee?" she asked.

Barraclough relayed her question.

"Lambert?"

Lambert nodded.

"Tom?"

The head moved silently, as the hand accelerated to catch up with the last sentences.

"I must stretch myself," said Barraclough, standing. "I get the most awful fibrositis in my back—the Anglo-Saxon complaint. Rheumatism, catarrh and premature deafness—it's our malaria. We're apathetic about it as the Egyptians about bilharzia. Just as damaging, too, though not so localised."

He walked around the room, and then waited while Margaret stood holding the coffee-tray.

"I want the table," she said peremptorily to the shorthand-writer. Without answering, he raised his head

till his eyes, colourless in the light from the window, stared into her own small eyes. Hastily, she put the tray on the desk, and left the room.

"Tom, you see," said Barraclough, "is a man of compelling personality. Black or white, Lambert?"

"White," said Lambert. "How much more of this is there?"

"Not much," said Barraclough reassuringly. "Perhaps another hour. I've got the main things down. I only want to deal with a few straggling threads. For example . . ."

He laid aside his half-finished cup of coffee, and the pen posed again.

"For example," he repeated, "when did your child die?"

"What's that got to do with you?" said Lambert.

"I'm sorry," said Barraclough. "It's relevant."

"It's relevant to nothing," said Lambert, "except to myself."

"And to your wife?"

"And to my wife."

•

It was relevant to Eleanore. After the winter and the piled-up snow, the blizzards from the lake setting the ice hard on the Chicago streets, after the short days when the Loop was brilliant with light at four o'clock in the afternoon and the children in the station-wagons had been wrapped in wool for a season, the spring came, and she was less afraid, seeing the rare magnolias and the plane trees in bud. In November, Nicholas had developed what Dr. Reed called "an upper respiratory infection" and she had sat with him constantly till the fever had gone. And during the days of Nicholas' illness, whenever Lambert returned at night from the Consulate or the parties of the Aviation Convention, he would find her sitting quietly, often in darkness, watchful and attentive, while in the next room, the nurse

listened resentfully to a wireless-set subdued almost to silence.

Each time, the same question. "How is he, nurse?"

"Better—quite better. There's no sense in Mrs. Lambert sitting in all the time."

And Eleanore would say, "I'm glad you're back, Martin. I was so worried at about four. But when Dr. Reed came, he said we needn't be alarmed . . ."

"I spoke to him," said Lambert. "He said Nicholas is quite better and that you're overdoing things—you mustn't exaggerate, darling. He's only had a bad cold."

"I know. But I'm worried about him. I'm always worried about him. I wish you didn't have to go out so much. Can't we sometimes be alone together—the three of us?"

And he had turned away in irritation, and said, "For heaven's sake, Eleanore. . . . You know I've got to do all this. You've become pathological about Nicholas. He isn't a child in arms. He's nearly eight, but you smother him with your devotion." And he had looked at her matt face, and added, "It's not really devotion. It's a form of selfishness. You've got to have some possession—something that's wholly yours."

"Why do you say that?" she had asked. And she followed him into the living-room. "I'm anxious about Nicholas. That isn't abnormal. And I'd rather stay with him. . . ." But he turned his back on her, and went into the bathroom, and started the shower.

It had been a good party at the Saddle and Cycle Club. He had wanted Eleanore to come, but, in a way, it had been better without her. Compared with American women, she was aloof and withdrawn, uncommunicative in feeling as well as in thought. But American women were friendly and challenging and gay. They encircled you with an aura of importance and exhilaration. They made you feel witty and

stimulating. The most ordinary sentences became epigrams when they stood listening, their eyes eager and interested. Like Marianne Kinross, Elizabeth McNally. And the pale girl with a fringe whom he had met at the end of the party. They weren't constantly preoccupied with their children, as Eleanore was with Nicholas. They saw life in perspective. He felt vigorous and energetic under the sharp jets of the shower bath. He dried himself, and felt that he'd like to telephone Augier, and go out again—the others had gone on to a night club. But, instead, he put on his pyjamas, and went into the bedroom where Eleanore, exhausted and fully dressed, lay fast asleep on the bed.

When the spring came, her anxieties, for a while, became less. She allowed Nicholas to go to school more often in the station-wagon, although she herself, despite his protests, insisted on taking him in their own car when the weather was specially cold. He was thin and fair, tall for his age, ardently interested in boats and swimming. For spacemen and cowboys he had an unalterable contempt. But his room was furnished and decorated with ships in all their manifestations—models of schooners, plans of the *Queen Mary,* pictures of battleships and even a ship in a bottle that Lambert had bought for him in a London junk-shop when he had been on leave.

"I want to go to Michigan," he had said in a slow, American voice that was a contrast with Eleanor's crisp, Southern English accent. Lambert wanted to send him to a school-camp, but Eleanore opposed the idea. She wanted to be near him. All their talk at breakfast was of their summer holiday together, of lakes and boats and rigs.

In late spring, her anxieties about his colds diminished only to be replaced by a new alarm when she heard that four cases of poliomyelitis had been reported nearby on

the North Side. Lambert reassured her.

At night, with their door an inch ajar in case Nicholas stirred, she would lie wakeful, and say, "Reassure me, my darling. I get so terrified about Nicholas—especially when you go away. I feel so insecure."

And he would hold her against his body and say, "There's nothing to be afraid of. Absolutely nothing. You will poison your whole life if you have this constant—vicarious hypochondria."

"I know," she said, "I can't help it. But when you're close to me like this, it's better. . . . He is all right, isn't he?"

"He's perfect."

"And he doesn't look frail—do you think?"

"He looks an American tough guy."

She sighed, and said, "I'm so glad. Why don't you kiss me?"

Towards the end of May, they felt the first stirrings of the summer heat. Men took off their jackets, and when the temperature rose the lake rolled heavy and turgid as it reflected the coppery colour of the sky. For three nights in succession, Lambert had been to parties for touring Members of Parliament.

"The most tiresome thing about them," he told Eleanore afterwards, "is that they come to lecture, and never stop. . . . Mind you, they're not so bad as ballet dancers. M.P.s will settle for a consular official. The ballet dancers want the whole diplomatic corps. Some journalist once called ballet dancers our travelling ambassadors, and they've taken him seriously ever since. There's a new batch in tomorrow. Lapworth's giving a party. Like to come?"

"Well," she said, putting her arms around him, "I will come—if we can get the sitter."

"Oh, come," he said, "you don't really want a sitter for a few hours."

"Yes, I do," she answered firmly. "Unless I can take him to the Garlands'. They've got that girl from the University who looks after Dick. When does the ballet open? I'd adore to go. Can you get tickets?"

And he put his arms around her, and said, "Eleanore, I'm tired of being away from England. If you like, I'll try and get posted home again."

She smiled against his shoulder, and said,

"Oh, Martin. I do want to be home again—we've been so much apart; even in America."

After the stewing heat outside, the refrigerator chill of the air-conditioned room. The ballet company arrived late, preceded by its impresario, an elderly American with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole, who acknowledged his chosen acquaintances with a discriminating droop of his hand. Behind him came the ballet's manager, her face and postures enamelled, each step an entrance, talking loudly and fluently.

"She's like a cannon that only fires blanks," Lambert said to Eleanore.

As the impresario advanced like a court chamberlain, the guests fell into a double hedge as if waiting to be presented. The ballerinas followed the manager, demurely and modestly.

"Let me introduce you to Livadnova," Lambert said to his wife. He introduced her to the dancer, and Eleanore asked, "Are you having an exhausting tour?"

"Oh, yes," said the ballerina, after a pause, friendly and inarticulate.

"And how do you like Chicago?" Eleanore asked encour-

agingly. The ballerina hesitated and looked for guidance towards the manager, who arrived at that moment.

"You love it," she said in her emphatic voice that made each syllable sound like an insult. "Don't you, darling?"

"Oh, yes," said Livadnova. And the movement of the crowd, now pressing, gaping and exclaiming, around the dancers, separated Eleanore from Lambert who waved and smiled to her over their heads.

"And how do you like Chicago, Mr. Lambert?" a girl with a fair fringe asked him. He remembered that he had met her with Augier in the winter, and he answered in the prescribed style of the occasion, "I like it a lot better now than three minutes ago. Let me get you a drink."

And they sat in a corner of the room in the alcove made by the grand piano and the wall, slowly drinking amid the accumulating chatter, the scent of the women and the sweat that pearled despite the air-machine.

At half past seven, Eleanore, withdrawing from the circle of laughing Americans around her, came up to him, and he said, rising, to the girl whose name he didn't know, "You know my wife, of course."

"My name is Isabel Fulton," the girl said. "Your husband's been telling me all about England. I bet you're longing to get back."

"Well," said Eleanore, smiling, "at the moment I'm longing to get back to our son. I've left him with friends, and I've promised to pick him up at half past seven, but Martin seemed to be enjoying himself so much . . ."

"Too bad," said the girl, and turning to Lambert she said, "You mustn't miss the night-shift."

With a wave of her hand, she left him, and a moment later was joining in the tail end of a joke in a nearby group of her acquaintances.

"Would you like to stay?" Eleanore asked Lambert.

"No," he said abruptly. "There's no point in staying."

He drove fast and without speaking through the park to the Garlands' house.

The evening sun was still hot as they drove, but a wind had begun to blow from the Lake, driving slow, emphatic waves against the concrete.

"I hope Nicky's wearing his coat," said Eleanore at last.

"Oh, for God's sake, stop fussing," said Lambert, and he turned the car into the drive. He got out, and his hair blew into his face.

"Hold on to your hat, Eleanore," he said. "It's pretty blowy."

From across the road, a few hundred yards away, they could hear the boom of the waves, powerful and incessant. Eleanore leapt out of the car, ran up the steps and pressed the bell. They waited for a few moments, and Eleanore brushed her hair back with her fingers. There was no reply.

"Ring again," said Lambert, and he tried to light a cigarette, but the wind blew it out. Again they waited outside the door, and Eleanore peered through the thick glass of the side windows. "Perhaps the bell's out of order," said Lambert. He put his left arm around Eleanore, and started to bang with his fist on the door. They heard the sound reverberate through the rooms as if the house were empty.

"They've probably gone for a walk," said Lambert. "They've probably gone down to the Lake with the girl. What time did the Garlands say they'd be back?"

"They're not coming back tonight," said Eleanore. "They've gone to Detroit. They won't be back till Wednesday. I arranged with Libby to pick up Nicholas here."

Lambert thudded with his fist against the door and again they waited for the reply to the sound.

"There can't be anyone in," said Eleanore. "It's so cold by the Lake. . . ."

"Don't worry," said Lambert, kissing her on the cheek. "Nicky can look after himself."

"No, he can't," said Eleanore. "He's such a little boy."

"Come on," said Lambert, soothingly. "Don't be silly. We'll drive down to the lakeside, and give him hell."

"No, you won't," said Eleanore. "I'll protect him."

"That's better," said Lambert. He looked at the sky that had changed in tone from its earlier livid colour to the serene, dark blue of evening. Already some drivers had switched on their headlights.

"Isn't the sky beautiful?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said, getting in the car. "Do hurry, darling. I don't want him to be out late without a coat."

Outside the drive, two small boys and a girl were standing, looking towards the house. When Lambert saw them, he stopped the car and said, "Hello, Carl, seen Dick—or Nicky anywhere?"

The children didn't answer, and the girl ran away.

"What is it, Carl?" Eleanore asked. "Have you seen Nicky?"

"Miss Bell said to tell you she expected you at seven-thirty," said the second boy. "She's gone!"

"I saw him, Mrs. Lambert," said Carl. "Not after, though. They went to the Lake."

"What do you mean?" said Lambert, getting out of the car. "Where's Nicky?"

"He went sailing his boat, Mrs. Lambert," said the second boy.

"Are they down at the Lake?"

"Sure," said the second boy, relieved at the clarification. "They're all down at the Lake."

Near the lakeside they saw the crowd assembling as if for a public meeting—cars parked by the side of the drive, hurrying boys, dawdling Negroes and an ambulance—out

of reach of the waves. Nothing on the vast horizon, no ship, no boat, no person. Lambert stopped the car; Eleanore had leapt out and was running to the centre of the crowd.

"What's happened. . . ?" she asked a policeman. "What's happened? I'm looking for my son."

"Just a minute," said the policeman. He led her through the crowd, with Lambert following, to the steps of the ambulance where a boy of about six sat wrapped in blankets.

"Dick," she said. "Dick. Where's Nicholas?"

"In the Lake," he said, and began to cry.

Weeks afterwards, when she had returned from hospital, and her cocktail-dress, soiled to the hips with the slime of the Lake, had been burnt, she said to Lambert in the middle of the night when, sleepless, she had stirred him from sleep, "It was your fault."

He had woken from his own anguish and repeated, "My fault?"

"Yes," she said calmly, lying on her back and staring into the darkness. "It was your fault. You never understood my love for Nicholas. You were jealous. You made me go to that party. . . . I loathed it. . . . That girl with the fringe . . . That's why Nicky . . ."

She began to weep as if there could be no end to her misery, and said, "I wish I were dead . . . I wish, I wish I were dead."

He put his arm on her shoulder, but she pushed it away. At last, when her sobbing ended, she put her wet, swollen face against his, and said, "I'm sorry, Martin. I'm terribly sorry. I hardly know what I'm saying."

And he said, "It's all right, my darling. Try and sleep. I understand how you feel."

But after a few days she again said to him, "It was your

fault. If it hadn't been for you, Nicky would be alive today." A fortnight later, she was found drunk in the car by the Planetarium. And at that time, too, Lambert heard at the Consulate that she was seeing Huysinger every day.

"Well?" said Barraclough.

"The date . . ." said Lambert.

"Yes, the date."

"It was May twenty-fifth. . . ."

"I see. And a day later, I notice, you were listed at a reception for the International Neurologists."

"Yes."

"And the following evening you were at a concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Mrs. Mayhew's party."

"Yes."

"You didn't allow your private grief to interfere with your duties."

Lambert flushed, and answered, "They were duties. I did what I had to."

Barraclough put up his hand.

"I'm not criticising you," he said. "I merely want to get the picture. What's the time, Tom?"

The shorthand-writer took out his fob-watch, and said, "Ten to twelve."

"Right-ho," said Barraclough. "We'll go on a little longer. Where were we?"

"You were asking me about Chicago. . . ."

"Chicago. Yes. Chicago . . . All this time, your wife was in the Macintyre Clinic . . ."

"Not all the time. She was there to begin with."

"To begin with?"

"Yes. I had her taken there from the City Hospital. She was at the Macintyre Clinic for about a week. After she came out . . . there was the trouble with the car. . . .

She then went to the Parker Clinic. . . . They made it a condition."

"Yes," said Barraclough sympathetically. "I understand. It must have been a very difficult time for you. But you had some excellent friends."

"They were all very good about it at the Consulate."

"And your other friends—the Andersons, the Marlowes, the Mayhews, and so on—they were very helpful and obliging."

"Very."

"And Isabel Fulton?"

The girl with the fringe. She had telephoned him early in June. Lambert looked quickly at Barraclough as he studied a foolscap sheet with a record of dates pricked out in red. His expression hadn't altered.

"I saw her a few times. She was sympathetic, and helpful."

"Did she ever visit Mrs. Lambert in hospital?"

"No."

"I had that impression," said Barraclough. "But let's move on. I notice here that you saw a lot of Augier in June and July. In fact, you travelled with him to Washington. . . ."

"Yes."

"Why?"

For a few moments Lambert didn't answer.

"Why?" Barraclough repeated.

"Well," said Lambert, "I wanted to get away for a bit from Chicago."

"And to help Augier?"

"Partly that. I wanted him to meet some of the new people on the staff."

"I see. You were, in fact, doing what you'd been doing for quite a long time. You were feeding Augier with facilities."

"You can call it that."

"He was somewhat in your debt."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I'll put it more simply. He was grateful to you."

"I wouldn't put it so strongly. It was my business to help the press. I tried to help everyone alike."

"Well, let me put the same thing differently—inside out, if you like. . . ."

Lambert waited.

"You were somewhat in *his* debt. . . ."

"In what way?"

"In the usual way." Barraclough's voice had become exact. "You owed him fifteen hundred dollars on July fifteenth."

"Well?"

"You'd got into debt with the clinics. . . ."

Lambert was silent.

"On July first you were overdrawn at the National and Mutual Bank by eleven hundred and three dollars . . ."

Lambert lit himself a cigarette. "You paid your bill at the clinics," Barraclough went on. "Did you ever repay Augier?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "I repaid him the whole lot in September."

"And borrowed another twelve hundred on December first. In fact, you've had a running account with him ever since. You are still, I think, in Augier's debt. . . ."

"What are you suggesting?" Lambert asked.

Barraclough threw his papers aside, and said, "Leave it, Tom. . . . I'll tell you what I'm suggesting. I'm suggesting this—that for years you've had the practice—a most proper and desirable one—of giving Augier information, background and general help. Right! And Augier—whatever his motives—goodwill, perhaps—self-interest—I don't know—Augier stood by you when you were in difficulties.

Very well! You've already told us—in precise terms—that you gave Augier the Brangwyn Report . . ."

". . . on Brangwyn's instructions."

"Let's take it step by step," said Barraclough. "I'm trying to see this as a normal, sensible person would see it. You have a motive of gratitude towards Augier. You have more than that—you have a general sympathy with his political point of view."

"That isn't true."

"Oh, yes, it is. You said to Cooper only two months ago—I've got it here—you said, 'I can understand the French wanting to be neutral.' "

"I did say that. And I added, '. . . but neutrality nowadays is a mirage.' You know, Barraclough, the trouble with informers is that they're usually out of context."

"We'll see about that," said Barraclough. "All I want you to do, Lambert, is to make a short statement, cancelling anything you've put out before. I want a short statement for the P.M. It'll go something like this. 'I—so and so and so and so—wish to state that on such and such a date at such and such a time at Burlington House delivered to Victor Augier, a French journalist representing *Le Monde Populaire,* a Foreign Office submission'—we won't call it a Cabinet paper—'believing, mistakenly as I now realise, that it was consistent with my responsibility in the News Department to provide this information in anticipation of the Rome Conference.' What do you think of it?"

"I think," said Lambert, "that there are too many words ending in 'ion.' "

"Perhaps," said Barraclough, gathering his file together. "You might like to improve its literary content between now and this evening. You're being stupid, Lambert. I'm trying to help you. Can't you see it?"

"No," said Lambert. "All I can see is that you're trying

to get from me a statement that you're a competent investigator. You're asking me for a lie, plausible enough to pass off as truth. I hope you won't think me impolite if I tell you to go to the devil."

"Not a bit," said Barraclough, standing. "Not a bit. I know exactly how you feel. I'll 'phone you this evening. In the meantime, of course, you might care to think of Sparr-Gamby. It would be a pity—not for him—he deserves ten years on principle—it would be a pity for one's faith in the appropriateness of the wages of sin if they locked him up for the Brangwyn Report. His mother's very upset about the whole thing."

He took his hat and raincoat from the piano-stool, and said, "Fancy anything for this afternoon?"

"You might try Graziella II for the 2.55," said Lambert.

"Make a note of it, Tom," said Barraclough. "Graziella. Graziella. Thank you, Lambert, we'll see you later."

XIII

THROUGH THE NARROW gates leading to the main London road, a movement of cars had already begun, outriders of the great procession that would follow the last race, the pebble-stirrings of the dark mass that spread around the rails and would soon disintegrate like a rock face. The children who had picnicked with their parents in the autumn sun were tired and cold. If the horses ran all the time it might be different. But the time between—the time between! The waiting about. The walking!

"I used to loathe the intervals between races," said Valerie to Lambert as they walked towards the parade-ring. "But Daddy always adored them. I wanted to see photo-finishes the whole time, and all I usually saw was some grown-up person's coat who got in my way when the horses were going past."

"And now?" said Lambert, looking at her eager face made bright by the evening wind.

"Now," said Valerie, "I'm a connoisseur."

"You're not understating it. . . ?"

"Oh, no. I'm really a connoisseur. I like looking at horses' rumps and fetlocks, making up my own mind. Hello, Edward. You know Martin Lambert—Edward Whyte-Parker—you met at the Institute dance."

"Good afternoon," said Whyte-Parker, who, in a grey

check suit and a bowler hat tipped slightly over his eyes, had been watching with a mournful attention the first horse, led by its groom into the ring.

"Hello," Lambert said, but Whyte-Parker went straight from his greeting into an analysis of Ecu d'Or.

"No use at all," he said to Valerie. "Top weight. Didn't do it last month at Harcastle—with a light wind. . . . Bissell says, 'Leave it alone.' "

"What about Camelot?" Valerie asked. "That is Camelot, isn't it?" pointing to a tall grey that walked, tossing its head, as the groom led it around the ring.

"No," said Whyte-Parker contemptuously, without taking his eyes off the parade. "That's Estobar. Camelot's got a small star. And besides, there's Major Bridewood and Morgan. . . ."

"Of course," said Valerie, apologetically. "How stupid of me!"

"Hello, my boy," said an elderly man in an ulster overcoat, approaching the rail. "Do any good today?"

Whyte-Parker raised his hat and said, "Good-afternoon, sir. Not too bad. This is Valerie Fergusson, Mr. Gordon Saltash . . . and this . . ."

"My name's Lambert."

"Marvellous day," said Saltash in a firm voice. "Marvellous day . . ."

"What's going to win the five o'clock?" Valerie asked.

There was a pause, and Whyte-Parker looked at her in amazement.

"Are you a punter, my dear?" Saltash asked.

"More or less," said Valerie.

"Well," said Saltash, "I can tell you in that case—as an owner—" he bent forward and whispered in her ear—"it's anyone's guess!" He raised his hat, and retired, laughing enthusiastically.

"Really, Valerie," said Whyte-Parker when Saltash had gone. "This isn't the right moment to pick up tips."

"Oh, rot," said Valerie, recovering her confidence. "You really shouldn't be so deferential to race-course conventions. And besides"—she passed to the counter-attack—"aren't you supposed to be up?"

The horses, mounted now, were beginning to pass through the exit from the ring on their way to the top of the course, and as their grooms led them in file through the gap, so did the advantages of his expertness forsake Whyte-Parker, one by one.

"I'm making it up in Long Term," he said in explanation. "I was going to telephone you, Valerie, and ask . . ."

"Let's get back, Valerie," said Lambert.

"Yes," said Valerie. "Good-bye, Edward."

She waved to him, as she took Lambert's arm, possessively and ostentatiously so that Whyte-Parker might see her allegiance, and called out, "See you when you come down."

"Valerie . . ." Whyte-Parker began again, but they were already hurrying in the direction of the stand.

"I find that young man odious without qualification," said Lambert.

"Do you, darling?" Valerie said happily. "I'm so glad. Actually, I find him rather sweet."

Lambert paused in the stream of racegoers who were hurrying towards the totalisators and the bookmakers in order to place their bets.

"In that case," he said, "perhaps I shouldn't have taken you away from his society."

"You're silly," she said. "I find everybody sweet today. I'm terribly, terribly happy. . . . Come on, Martin. I'm so glad Daddy couldn't come. . . . Poor old Daddy . . . I hope he's all right."

The draw for positions had already gone up on the

board, a declaration against the evening sky that the last chance had come for the disappointed to redeem their falsified hopes of the earlier races.

"How do we stand?" Lambert asked Valerie.

"We're thirty-two pounds up—you are. I've won thirty-two shillings."

He took her ungloved hand, and held it warmly enclosed in his own. Amid the litter of tote-tickets trampled in the turf, ice-cream cartons, rejected newspapers, they stood examining their own race-cards. The clamour of the bookmakers began to fade as the first of the horses cantered collectedly up the course.

"What shall we do?" Lambert asked.

"Mirabelle!" Valerie said quickly. "Each way."

"What about Petard—ten to one? If I put thirty pounds . . ."

"Oh, Martin, you couldn't possibly. . . ."

"Why not? What do you want, Mirabelle or Petard?"

"All right—Petard—ten shillings each way. How much are you putting on?"

He pushed through the group gathered around a stand called McCormick, and said, "What are you giving for Petard?"

The bookmaker looked down at his clerk who went on writing, and said, "Nines."

"Right you are," said Lambert. "I want twenty—no make it thirty pounds on Petard."

"Petard, thirty," said the bookmaker and the clerk indifferently handed Lambert a card.

"The start of a race," said Valerie, "is always somehow like the beginning of a sermon. Everybody becomes so terribly solemn."

In the stands and at the rails, the faces were turned in silence towards the starting post near the trees, scarcely

visible because of the bend in the course and the evening mist. Lambert raised his glasses towards the blur of red, mauve and brown, moving in a congested and languid motion that seemed to quicken as it came within the attraction of the crowd.

"I can see Petard," he said to Valerie. "Second—no, third. What's the thing with blue stripes and blinkers?"

"Acolyte . . ." said Valerie. "Do let me see."

She took his binoculars, and began to focus them.

"It's Acolyte—Estobar, I think it is—Mirabelle—Molla—and Daisy Chain, I think."

"Where's Petard?"

"I can't see him at all."

She handed Lambert the glasses, and he held them in his hand. The horses were now in sight, and Valerie and Lambert moved down towards the rails, while the crowd began an incantation of the horses' names. Spread out now—Mirabelle, Estobar, Molla, Acolyte, Daisy Chain, and a straggling field—they drummed past with a spattering of earth towards the finishing post.

"Well, that's that," said Lambert. "Foam, blood and sweat. Petard, my darling, wasn't disgraced. Not last. Last but one."

They both burst out laughing, and continued to laugh, leaning on the white rail with their arms around each other's shoulders, till Valerie said, "How much did you have on?"

"Thirty pounds," said Lambert. "If I'd backed Mirabelle . . ."

"If we'd backed Mirabelle!" said Valerie. "You should have taken my advice."

"Oh, come," said Lambert. "Post-mortem diagnosis."

"I know," said Valerie. "I didn't mean it. I'm glad you backed Petard. I hate people—like myself—who always

back things both ways. It's so niggling."

"I wanted to win two hundred and fifty pounds," said Lambert. "Pity!"

"What would you have done with it?" Valerie asked as they moved with the current of racegoers towards the car-park. A sudden heave of the crowd separated Lambert from Valerie, and he found himself addressed by an angry and disappointed backer.

"He bit him," the backer said, his face puffed in the chilly air by beer and indignation. "I saw it. Acolyte bit him twice. I saw it. He had his head over Jonsey's leg. Molla won it . . . three lengths he won it. . . ."

"I quite agree," said Lambert, looking over his shoulder at Valerie, who stretched her hand towards him through the currents of the crowd.

"He grabbed him twice," said the backer, pressed hard between Lambert and a middle-aged, panting woman who kept repeating resentfully, "I wish they wouldn't push. . . . I wish they wouldn't push."

Lambert tried to make a way through the crowds that converged from the stands and the track near the entrance to the car-park, but a series of attendants directing the traffic held them dammed at the embouchements. He could no longer see Valerie among the strange, impatient and uncomfortable faces around him, and he said to the backer, who was now invoking him, nose to nose, "Pretty big field . . ."

"That's what they did to Molla—pocketed him—right on the rails."

The crowd had stopped moving forward, but a second series of arrivals who had been collecting their winnings compressed those already near the barriers into a packed wedge at the exit. "Move along there," a voice called loudly from behind.

"I wish they'd stop pushing," said the woman at Lambert's side. "I can't breathe. . . ."

"Too much weight," said the backer into Lambert's face. "She give too much away. . . . If Molla didn't win at Brinton . . ."

As if held by a central pivot, the crowd began to sway, a delicate, hardly sensible oscillation, a lulling, rhythmical rocking.

"Why don't you move along there? Move along," voices called. "They've gone for dinner," someone else said, and the laughter ran like a flame along a fuse, disturbing the gentle motion. But a moment later it began again.

Lambert raised his arms clear of his hemmed-in sides, and began again to look across the heads for Valerie. He glimpsed her hair. She had moved through the earlier interstices of the crowd, and was standing near the barrier, twisting around as if in search of him. He waved to her, but the swaying of the crowd was now accompanied by a chant, "One—two—three—four—what—are—we—waiting—for—" and moved her from his vision. "One—two—three—four . . ."

"I can't breathe," the woman said at his side. She had let go of her umbrella which now stood supported between her and her neighbour by the pressure of the crowd. "I had a stone taken out last spring. . . ."

"He swerved at the start," said the backer. "Lost a lot of ground. . . . Give over there!"

He had suddenly taken conscience of the heaving people around him, and his indignation against Acolyte now found another target.

"It's a bloody disgrace," he said to Lambert. "They'll have the barriers down in a bit."

"I can't breathe," said the woman next to him.

From behind them came the sing-song, "One—two—three—four . . ." mingled at last with a shout, as if in a rugby scrum, of "Heave!"

"Now," thought Lambert, "here it comes," and in the moment that he looked for Valerie, the fulcrum of the crowd moved forward in its entirety, changing the rhythm of the gentle rocking into a single, tottering swing. He heard the barriers crack, and saw the farthest figures sink as the crowd poured forward into the roadway that led to the car-park. Lambert, carried far into the road by the on-rush, turned against the stream to look for Valerie.

"Are you looking for me?" she said, coming up behind him. He didn't answer, but put his arm around her while the police, brisk and contemptuous of the race-course custodians, re-formed the lanes of traffic and ended the brief panic.

"I hope you don't think I abandoned you, darling," she said. "I had to get through quickly because I was surrounded by beastly old men."

"When I saw the barriers fall . . ." Lambert said.

"No one was hurt," said Valerie. "A few people fell. It was all the fault of those fatuous attendants. Why is it that a peak cap makes people so stupid? Were you worried about me?"

"Dreadfully," said Lambert.

"That's very satisfactory," said Valerie. "Very!"

Lambert was following the line of cars that led to the main road.

"Why were you worried about me?" she asked.

"Shall I spell it out?" Lambert answered. He turned into a side-road, leading across country to Pelling.

"I'd like you to," said Valerie, leaning back comfortably in the car. "Tell me everything."

"Everything?" Lambert repeated. "I can't tell you everything. I'll tell you some of the things."

He was driving slowly through the narrow, hedge-lined roads.

"Well, to begin with," he said, "when I came to Pelling, I had only one thought in my mind. It was to see your father —an old friend of mine—someone I've always liked and admired—and still do."

"And yet you seem so different from each other. What do you like in him?" she asked.

"I like him because he has always seemed to me a completely civilised person—wise and tolerant—not perfect in himself—not by any means—fallible in his own life, but tolerant—the sort of man you go to when you have doubts and difficulties."

"Was that why you came to stay with us this time?"

"I think it was. I wanted to get away for a few days from the Foreign Office, and besides . . ."

She was listening to him with her gaze set rigidly in front of her.

". . . besides," he went on, "I wanted to ask his advice."

"Did you ask his advice?"

"No," said Lambert, and his hands moved over the steering wheel. "Not about that—not about the matters I wanted to ask him about. I asked his advice about other things—the Foreign Office."

She turned her face to him, and said, "Are you in frightful trouble, Martin? I keep pushing the thought to the back of my mind, but suddenly it comes rushing back. I don't understand what it's all about. . . ."

"Don't worry, Valerie," Lambert said. Absently, he fingered the artificial pearls that hung over her jumper. "Don't worry about that. It's all nonsense."

"But it isn't nonsense," she said, withdrawing from him.

"How can it be when Barraclough is constantly hanging about—and the Brangwyn Report—and your resignation? Have you done anything wrong?"

"No," he said to her. "I've done nothing wrong—nothing, —absolutely nothing."

"But Barraclough thinks you have. . . ."

"That may be."

"And Daddy—what does he think?"

"I'm not sure."

"But . . ."

He put his hand on her mouth. "Don't ask about it any more. I'm tired of justifying myself," he said, and added, seeing her flush, "Don't be hurt, my darling. It's simply that if I have to cope with it, I'll have to do it alone and at the proper time."

"I'm sorry, Martin," Valerie said. "I want to help—not to be bothersome. Go on with what you were saying."

"Where was I?"

"You were saying about why you came to Pelling, and about me."

"About you?" said Lambert. "Yes . . . about you. I'd almost forgotten what you looked like. At least, I remembered you as a child—a rather pleasant, mousy child—well-brought-up and shy. . . ."

"I see!" said Valerie. "Do you remember giving me a sprig of wistaria when you were last at Pelling—in the garden?"

"No, I don't," Lambert answered. "Why?"

"It's not important," said Valerie. "I just wondered. Go on."

"I was saying—I'd more or less forgotten that you existed. And then, when I saw you—when I held your hand behind the chair—rather guiltily . . ."

"Why guiltily?"

"Well—" his voice quickened—"it was a form of disloyalty to your father. He'd given me privileged access to his house—"

"But it was my fault as well. . . . I wanted you to hold my hand . . . and it was wonderful. It's what I think of most when I think about you—the feel of your hand."

For a while Lambert drove without speaking. At last he said, "You see, it coincided with all this other business—the Brangwyn Report, Baggott—the whole lot. And in all the misery—you were there. It made everything else seem trivial. Everything. The Foreign Office, newspapers, promotion, even wars. They all fell away from my thought. You were the centre, and everything else was on the circumference."

"And Eleanore?"

"And Eleanore. For years it's been useless."

And, as if irrelevantly, he remembered her early in their marriage at the Kembal Point-to-point when she had run across the fields, a scarf over her hair, to the third jump, and he had followed her with the shooting-stick. She had been very beautiful with her pale fair hair and glowing skin, taller than Valerie, athletic and graceful.

With the memory of Eleanore in his mind, he returned, with a faint discontent, to Valerie on whose chin the setting sun illuminated a small pustule. She took his left hand, kissed it, and said, "Your hand's cold, darling," and laid it against her breast.

"And that's all there is to it," he said.

"Pull up by those trees," Valerie said. He turned into the shadow of a wood, and drove the car onto the grass.

"What do you mean," she asked, "when you say, 'That's all there is to it'?"

"I mean," he answered, "that I'm leaving tomorrow. I'm going to France."

"And me?" she asked quickly. He kissed her eyes and her lower lip.

"You . . ." he began.

"Yes, me," she said. "What about me?"

"I'll be back next April," he said.

"Martin," she said. "Let me come with you."

"It's impossible . . . absolutely impossible."

"Well, let me follow you—next month. Please, Martin—please. I'd do anything—really I would. I'd be a domestic servant. I'd do anything."

A car with headlights full on swept through the dusk and lit up her tense face.

"Please, Martin . . ." she said, and he could feel the rapid beat of heart against his palm.

He answered, "It's impossible, Valerie—quite impossible. I've been thinking about it—I have many difficulties—too many. . . . The Foreign Office and your father—my wife—it's quite impossible."

"But Martin—my sweet, silly darling—just *because* of the Foreign Office and my father and your wife—and all the miseries to come—the atom bomb and everything—isn't that a perfect reason for going away—and having *some* happiness? Isn't that reasonable?"

"Not reasonable," said Lambert. "Wonderful without being reasonable."

"And why did you want to win two hundred and fifty pounds?"

Lambert put his fingers over her ears and through her hair.

"Because," he said, "I had a vague hope."

"There!" she said triumphantly. "You do want me to come. . . . Darling Martin, I promise I won't be a nuisance. I've got a hundred and thirty pounds of my own. It'll last for ages. Next month . . . I'll make up some story or

other. I'll make Daddy let me go on a course or something. Will you, Martin?"

He kissed her mouth, and she said, "Let's not go back yet. Have you ever been to Versailles?"

"Yes."

"What's it like?"

"Big—rambling—dusty."

"Will you take me there?"

"Yes—if you like."

"And Père-Lachaise?"

"It's a cemetery."

"I know. I want to see Chopin's grave. . . . And Armenonville—will you take me to dance there?"

"Not in winter. In the summer . . ."

"That will do. But you will walk with me in the Tuileries?"

"Yes."

"Darling Martin."

"Yes?"

"I'm feeling wonderfully sleepy and tired."

She took his arm, and pressed her face in his shoulder, and slowly, like that, they drove till the postern-light of the house came into sight.

"Wake up, Valerie," he said. "We're home."

"I'm awake," she said. "Martin, I didn't tell you this morning. Eleanore 'phoned."

"When?" Lambert asked sharply.

"Last night."

"Did she leave any message?"

"No."

"And no address."

"No. Please don't be angry."

He took the steering wheel with both hands, and said, "I wish you'd told me earlier."

Later, when they met in the hall, Valerie said, "There's something else, Martin."

"What is it?" he asked, contrite at her doleful expression. "Don't worry about the telephone call. She'll ring again."

"It isn't that," Valerie said, and began to speak more quickly. "I meant to tell you—there was a letter for you. . . ."

"All right," he said, "give it to me."

"I opened it," she said.

He looked at her in amazement.

"I read it," she said, and, handing him the thin, wrinkled letter, ran past him upstairs.

XIV

"YOUR FRIEND BARRACLOUGH . . ." Fergusson said, and his glance drifted away like an empty boat on a tide. Lambert, waiting for the sentence to end, watched his face in the shadow of the library lamp. But Fergusson had settled into the brooding contemplation of a private interest from which Lambert hesitated to divert him.

"Yes," said Fergusson, returning to the conversation, "I find nowadays that the expectation of pleasure usually disturbs my heart. The result is that I'm only fit for the most boring occasions. I was sorry I couldn't join you this afternoon."

"We were sorry, too," said Lambert. "Except at the end. There was an absolute chaos at the car-park."

"So I hear," said Fergusson, pouring a glass of sherry for Lambert. "So I hear. Barraclough . . . He was here about an hour ago."

"He must have driven pretty fast."

"Oh, well," said Fergusson, casually, "he had no reason to dawdle. He said he'd call again. And by the way, Martin," Fergusson rose and leaned against the fireplace, "he asked me to thank you for Graziella II. He made a killing—something like two pounds three. . . ."

Lambert drank his sherry, and said, "You see how close our friendship's become. We'll soon be on Christian name terms."

He felt the crisp paper of Eleanore's letter in his pocket, and wanted, in the hiatus of Fergusson's thought and speech, to re-read the small, neat handwriting as he had already done twice since his return. ". . . say, one hundred pounds, it would be a great help." And he determined, as soon as he reached London, to go to his bank and arrange for the sale of two hundred pounds' worth of Government stock that he had kept in reserve. "I am feeling so much better. I don't see anyone, and don't want to." Lambert smiled to himself and wondered for how long. ". . . And if I end this letter by saying that I love you . . ."

He dismissed the words from his mind, as he heard Fergusson say, "He already calls you Martin behind your back."

"Well, I'd return his courtesy if I knew his first name. But there are some people who never have first names. Barraclough's one of them, I suspect."

Fergusson put his glass down, still half-full, and said, "Let's go in to dinner."

"What about Valerie?"

Fergusson, who was already walking towards the library door, stopped and said, "Valerie has a headache. She won't be coming down. You see, Martin, there are one or two matters I want to talk to you about. I've already spoken to Valerie, and I was anxious for us . . ." His voice faded, and he said, "At any rate, let's have dinner."

"I don't think so," said Lambert, returning to his chair. "I'd much prefer to know now what you want to talk about."

"Very well," said Fergusson, "I can tell you very briefly."

And the thought that Valerie, in taking the letter, had merely anticipated some presumptuous lecture by her father, stirred in Lambert a double resentment. ". . . how it was our love and happiness came to ruin. . . ." Those

were private words that only he and Eleanore could understand. And he tightened his grip on the letter in shame that once he had confided his unhappiness about Eleanore to Fergusson, and in anger that the words had lain naked under a stranger's curiosity.

Fergusson took a pile of books from a chair, and dropped them on the floor. Then, settling himself into the seat, he said,

"I am going to speak plainly to you, Martin. If I am mistaken in my judgments, I have no doubt you will tell me. And if I wound you by anything that is a misjudgment, I hope you'll forgive me."

He spoke without looking at Lambert.

"You see, Martin," he said, "for the last few days I've been anxious—for you and for myself."

"You need have no anxiety for yourself," Lambert interposed quickly. "I've told Barraclough . . . I've explained to him that this is the first time I've been here for years. . . ."

"My dear fellow," said Fergusson, waving the explanation away, "that's not it at all. Not at all. I'm not thinking of that. When I say 'myself,' I mean that I am anxious—" he spoke more slowly now—"anxious about Valerie. She's a child—still. She's a child. A rather uninformed and ingenuous child. All this rather sophisticated excitement—it isn't good for her. You understand, Martin, don't you?"

"Not really," said Lambert, looking straight at Fergusson, who was sitting with his chin sunk on his chest. "I can't think of Valerie in those terms—they don't define her at all. She's eighteen. You've described someone in a gym-slip."

("Please, Martin, let me come home . . ." It was too late. Much too late to start again.)

"That wasn't my intention," said Fergusson. "Perhaps I should have been more exact. I was telling you, Martin,

somewhat euphemistically, that Valerie is a great deal younger than you are, that she is, in fact, on the threshold of her adult life—and that you—"

"Well?" said Lambert.

"How old are you?" Fergusson asked. "Thirty-eight, thirty-nine?"

"I'm thirty-nine."

"Thirty-nine," Fergusson repeated. "Thirty-nine. Valerie was born in the year you left Cambridge. Does that explain my meaning to you?"

Lambert didn't answer.

"She's been talking to me in the last day or two," said Fergusson, "about going to France."

He paused, and Lambert watched him forming his next phrase.

"She is very eager to go—excessively eager to go," said Fergusson. "Can you explain her urgency?"

"I don't know," said Lambert. "I can only guess. And I imagine . . ."

"Never mind," said Fergusson. "I think you have taken my point. You're leaving tomorrow, Martin, and you've got a lot to disturb you."

With a slight gasp, he heaved himself from his chair.

"But—what I want to convey to you—is this. I am very concerned that Valerie should be happy, and free from unnecessary torments. When I saw her tonight, she appeared to have been weeping. . . . If her mother were alive, it would be different. As it is, the responsibility is mine. There's nothing I wouldn't do to keep her from coming to harm. Absolutely nothing. You understand that?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "I understand that perfectly."

"In that case," said Fergusson, "I think we can go in and dine."

He led the way across the hall, humming a tuneless improvisation.

When Lambert finished packing his suitcase, he looked in the drawer for his passport, but, not finding it there, decided that he must have left it in the jacket of his other suit, and that early next morning, he could repack the case that now gaped, open and inflated, on the floor. If he arrived in London before one o'clock he would have time to go to the bank, buy his air-ticket, and take the evening aeroplane to Paris. At worst, should he not get a seat, he could take the night ferry. Once he had reached Paris, he would be able to disengage himself from Barraclough, the intrusive questions, the obsessive names and be able to consider calmly and without hurry what he should do next.

He would tell no one that he had arrived. Instead of staying at the Castiglione as he usually did when in Paris, he would go immediately to the Boudin in the Boulevard Raspail, and there in privacy, he would wait. He wasn't sure about his letters. He could arrange later for them to be forwarded. With fifty pounds' worth of currency, he could live in a small hotel for several weeks. A room, a light lunch, a moderate dinner. Lambert remembered a few days that he had spent in Paris at the end of the war, when he had felt free as he had not felt since he had been an undergraduate. Without duties to anyone, an individual, released from orders. And the thought of the Boudin with its narrow entrance hall, the cashier in black behind the counter, the porter in the foreground of his board of thirty keys, and the lift, big enough for two people and valises, that never broke down, was like the expectation of a holiday.

After, say, three days, he would telephone Osborne and Carter-Brown at the Embassy. It depended, of course, on

what the P.M. said, but by then the whole affair might have blown over.

Lambert got into bed, and began to read for the third time the *Guardian's* leading article on the Brangwyn Report.

"No one," it said, "would be more relieved than the Prime Minister if he could assure the nation that the Report, published so inopportunely for Western collaboration and our hopes for the Rome Conference, is a forgery. Yet, if as the authority of *Le Monde Populaire* suggests, the Report is an authentic document, then despite the deplorable circumstances of its arrival in the hands of the French press, the Prime Minister has a twofold duty—to assure Parliament that Britain does not intend a disengagement from her old and steadfast ally, and, of equal importance to our safety, that those guilty of a damaging betrayal should be sought out and punished."

Lambert put the paper down and lit a cigarette. Brangwyn had delivered the paper. Brangwyn had thought out the whole idea. Brangwyn was responsible for the Conference's failure even to begin. From the first it was what he had wanted, and Padley had known it, but he hadn't been strong enough to resist him. And Baggott, Barraclough, the officials and the policemen—they didn't care whose idea it was. All they wanted was a capture—Sparr-Gamby, himself, anyone. "But you did give Augier the report?" Barraclough had said. And he had answered, "Yes."

But he would wait. He would get a job in Paris. Perhaps he might write under a pseudonym, and become the Paris correspondent of some London newspaper. With care —Delavigne was always pressing him to stay at his house in Touraine—he might manage—after all, he knew large numbers of people who were always offering him hospitality —Vaudrin, Chambord, Priedieu, de la Motte, and Lebras-

seur—he might manage to last out three or four months, even without a job. Eleanore would have to know. He couldn't shelter her from it any longer.

And Valerie. Valerie.

The house had fallen into silence, except for an occasional creak of the furniture and joists. "It's a very old house," Valerie told him in the garden years ago. "We used to have lots of mice, but one night we set traps for them. The whole place rattled like castanets. They're gone now."

And he thought of Eleanore, looking with him over the balustrade of the skating rink at the foot of the skyscraper of Rockefeller Plaza. The flags were blowing in the wind, and the skaters, wrapped against the cool autumn air, were circling on the pale-blue ice in time to a waltz. He had put his arm around her shoulders, and her face was laid close against his.

"I like this," he said. "It's very gay."

And she said,

"It's so fantastic. It's like a mother suckling a child in the middle of a battlefield."

He had laughed, but her face was grave, and a few seconds later they became tired of the chain of skaters and walked back to their hotel on East Forty-eighth Street. That was when they were on their way home from Chicago.

Not long afterwards, he had come to Pelling to see Fergusson. In those days, Valerie was still a child, her features indeterminate and her general appearance artless, subdued by her father's presence into a prim timidity.

Smoking in the darkness, Lambert remembered how when Fergusson had left them together, the first time, she had begun to tell him about Miss Fretts and Convocation Day. ("Don't let the purser get you," Walker said to him

and Eleanore at the crowded cocktail party in their cabin before they sailed. "Boy, he'll bore the pants off you!") She had spoken at length about Miss Fretts and Convocation, and his mind had played on other matters, till in relief he had invited her to walk in the garden. After that, he had forgotten her. She had merged with the handshakes of his work. When he met her again, it was as if he were meeting someone whom he had never seen before; nor could Fergusson's endeavour to relate her to the short schoolgirl who had hurried at his side, talking rapidly, have any validity.

Idly, and without deliberation, he had allowed his hand to trail close to hers, and her fingers had touched and crooked in his, as if it were proper that it should be so, and as if the understanding were complete that it should be surreptitious; and their hands had begun, hidden from the sight of Fergusson, their tentative conversation, an antiphon, swelling in secret, their palms, moist and earnest, moving in a slow rotation. Whether it was right or wrong, good or bad, that was how it had begun. She was no longer a child, but a woman, listening to Fergusson's threnody, his lament over life.

"He'll bore the pants off you," a voice intervened in Lambert's drowning mind, and feeling the cigarette end burning his finger, he stubbed it out in the ashtray.

And if she wanted to leave this atmosphere of pessimism and decay, to escape from Fergusson's regrets and exchange them for her own satisfactions! Lambert remembered her face and her mouth and her hands, the Boudin, and the window on the Boulevard Raspail, the occasional voices in the middle of the night and the long looking-glass reflecting the street-lamps. After he had been there two or three days, she would meet him in the lounge, and they would go to his room, and he would help her to take off her coat, facing her, seeing behind her shoulder the reflection of her neck and

the two strands of hair in the looking-glass. Far away from Barraclough and Fergusson and the Foreign Office and Eleanore, alone and liberated, they would lie awake in the darkness, while he watched the outline of her young face against the window, with hope in the days to come.

The stench of the burning aeroplance came back to him, and he turned his face into the pillow, trying to remember Valerie, but instead the image of Eleanore returned to his mind. During the war, on embarkation leave, he had taken Eleanore from London to spend the last night in a small Surrey hotel. Their bedroom faced north, and throughout the early hours they had lain listening to the tremble of guns around London, and watched the quivering lights on the horizon.

Eleanore said to him, "I'm terribly afraid of dying—terribly. I sometimes stay awake for hours thinking about being nothing. I find it so horrible to think of being nothing. . . ."

Close to the bed, his uniform slouched over a chair, and he could see the buttons glittering in the gun-flashes.

"And sometimes," she went on, talking with her mouth on his lip, "I'm afraid to shut my eyes, because I'm afraid that if I shut them I won't wake up again. But when I'm with you, I'm never afraid of anything. I feel so safe and secure, and I don't even mind dying."

"You must go to sleep," he had said. The mutter of aeroplanes overhead was fading, and the sky had become dark again.

"I don't want to sleep," she answered. "I want to be awake all night with you, and be conscious of you every second. Please tell me, darling, you will write to me often. . . ."

"Very often. . . ."

"Every day?"

"As often as I can."

"And you won't fall in love with some Italian or Arab—or A.T.S. girl. Promise!"

"I promise."

Soon afterwards, she fell asleep, and he watched her profile against the window for hours till the day broke, and he too slept. When they awoke, the sun was already warm, and they could hear a convoy that was moving away from its assembly point under the pine trees.

"Oh, darling," Eleanore said, "it's tomorrow morning." And added quickly, "I'm not going to cry."

"In that case," Lambert answered, "I'll ring for breakfast."

And she had said, "Not yet."

He thought of the faces in silhouette against the sky, and that if his happiness with Eleanore after the war had merely been intervals in misery, so too their miseries had been intervals in happiness. At Megève, Dijon, Rome—those were long, relaxed months of delight when they had seemed able to forgive each other their accumulation of harm and to expunge their bitterness. But at other times, like a germ that works in the blood till it bursts into a high fever, their memory exploded into bitter, unrestrained reproach.

"The leaves are falling in the Pincio Gardens . . ." Eleanore had written. They sat in the open air, looking at the dancers in the Casino, and afterwards, in the dusk, they walked through the gardens past the alley-way of peeling statues to the children's fountain by the cypress trees. They had watched a small boy probing the water with a stick, under the screaming admonitions of his mother from a nearby bench.

"Have you caught any fish?" Eleanore asked the boy in Italian. But the child didn't answer, and when she repeated her question, he ran terrified to his mother. They took a horse-drawn cab, and drove back in silence to their hotel.

"You too might have had some part in the unhappiness we shared . . ." she had written. Perhaps she was right. *"Par dessus les étoiles, par dessus les arbres . . ."* Nicholas: Nicholas would never come back. And Eleanore in nursing homes and hotels: Awake at night, afraid of being nothing: And of Nicholas being nothing. *". . . par dessus les arbres, qu'y a-t-il? Qu'y a-t-il?"*

"And if I end this letter by saying I love you . . ."

They had loved each other, and been separated by wars and hotels and duties. He heard Eleanore's voice in his mind, and wished he had spoken to her on the telephone. And at that moment, Valerie seemed an officious stranger who had interfered without understanding.

In the morning. In the morning when he had got rid of Barraclough, he would try and telephone Eleanore. The Regina. Eleanore Lambert. The Regina.

He stepped from the lift and walked into the cylinder. Nicholas sat there smiling. "Where's the exit, Nicky?" he asked. Someone was rattling at a locked door. "It's all right," said Eleanore. "It's a dream. They're trying to get in."

In his sleep, Lambert struggled to call her name, groaned and awoke, drenched in sweat and panting. The sadness of Eleanore's face; Nicholas, smiling and dead. And outside the door an amorphous horror trying to get in. Lambert lay unmoving till his rapid heart-beat had become more tranquil. A few seconds later, he heard a light knock at the door. Again his heart began to beat faster—as if the dream

were transposed into reality.

"Who's there?" he asked.

The handle turned slowly, and the door opened inch by inch.

"It's me, Valerie. I heard you call out," Valerie said in a whisper from the half-open door. "Is anything wrong?"

Lambert sat up, and said, "No. There's nothing wrong."

"Would you like anything—a glass of water?"

"No. Come in and shut the door."

Lambert switched on the light, and she stood, barefoot, in the blue dressing gown.

"Come here, Valerie," he said. "Sit on the bed. I want to talk to you."

Seeing that he didn't smile, she went and sat on his bed, and said, "Well?"

Then she touched his damp forehead with her fingers, and said again, "Is anything wrong?"

"No," he repeated, "there's nothing wrong. I had a bad dream. Valerie, you know I'm leaving tomorrow."

"What time are you going?"

She had begun to shiver, and he took her hand in his.

"I'm leaving early. After breakfast."

"And me—what about me?"

"I'll write to you—later on."

"But . . . Are you still angry with me about the letter . . . about the 'phone call?"

"No. I'm not angry—not any more."

"You see, I wanted to help you—to keep you away from anything that might worry you. I knew that you already had so much to make you anxious and unhappy. Please, Martin—I've been so miserable the whole evening. I haven't slept at all—not at all."

Lambert put his hand on her forearm in the sleeve of her dressing gown, and looked at her tormented face.

"Don't think about it any more, my darling," he said. "It's all over now. . . . Thank you—thank you very much for trying to help me."

"Please don't be ironic. . . ."

"I'm not ironic. I mean it very sincerely. One day, when I remember you and Pelling, I will remember most of all, my darling Valerie, that you tried to help me."

"And can't I really help you? I so much want to give you happiness."

He drew her face down to the pillow, and examined it slowly.

"I can see one of your eyes," she said. "Your right eye."

And he said, "You look very young. And so very pretty."

"I am very young," she answered solemnly. "But not very pretty."

"As young as when I first saw you."

"I love you," she said. "I think of you all the time, and love you. I'll always love you. You think that because I'm so young I can't feel love . . ."

"No. I don't think that."

". . . or that it's not real love. It's real to me. Terribly real, and acute."

He kissed the side of her mouth and said, "I wonder if in a year's time . . ."

"In a year's time and ten years' time and . . . Oh, Martin. You will meet me in Paris. Please, Martin, please!"

"It's impossible," he said, raising her up. "It's impossible."

"But you promised . . ."

"It was a phantasy—a daydream. You mustn't leave your father. Not yet. He was absolutely right when he spoke to me this evening. . . ."

"But you said . . ."

"I know. . . . I was wrong."

She was sitting upright looking at him with affronted eyes.

"How can you speak like that?" she asked him. "It was you who told me I was wasting my life here. You who said that Daddy had no right . . . How can you change so suddenly!"

"I haven't changed," he said, propping himself on his elbow. "I haven't changed at all. But all of a sudden I know that I must acquiesce in reality."

"I don't know what you mean," she said. Her hand that he had taken in his had become limp and cold, and she looked across him at the wall.

"I mean," said Lambert, "that I bring with me too many burdens, too many uncertainties. You mustn't begin your adult life in a dingy French hotel—with a married man—who is running away from his troubles."

"But if we love each other . . ." she said, and he was silent.

"Doesn't that mean anything?" she asked. "You said . . ." Her voice faded away, and he felt her palm in his, inert and listless.

"Good-night," he said. "My dear, darling Valerie."

She got up from the bed, and walked slowly in her bare feet to the door. She opened it cautiously, and it squeaked a little. Then she turned, her eyes welling with tears, and said in a loud whisper, "Good-night, Martin," and ran down the passage to her room.

XV

"THERE'S TWO MEN to see you," said Margaret, switching on the light, and putting the cup of tea at the side of the bed. She closed the windows, and peered out at the mist-covered fields. "It's nasty," she said. "Do you want the fire on?"

"What's the time, Margaret?" Lambert muttered, opening his eyes slowly and looking at the halo of light thrown by the lamp on the ceiling, and from there to the bowl of dahlias that Valerie had put on his dressing table the day he arrived.

"It's ten past seven," she said. "They said you wasn't to hurry. What shall I tell them?"

Lambert pulled himself up in the bed, and rested his face in his hands for a few seconds before answering her.

"Tell them to wait in the library," he said. "What are they doing now?"

"They're outside."

"All right, thank you, Margaret. I'm sorry they disturbed you."

"I'm always up at quarter to seven," she said proudly. "Wouldn't know what to do if I laid in after that."

As soon as she had left the room, Lambert turned off the light and went to the window. In front of a black car parked diagonally between his own car and the gate, Barraclough,

wearing an overcoat and scarf, and the shorthand-writer, bareheaded and coatless, were walking up and down in conversation. Their voices were lowered and muted by the window-glass, and they moved discreetly over the crunching gravel as if they were reluctant to disturb the household. Lambert heard the door open and Barraclough paused; with his breath turning to vapour in the cold air, he spoke to the shorthand-writer who climbed into the black car and reversed it till it completely blocked the gateway. Then he saw Barraclough remove his hat, and lead the way into the house.

Lambert put on his dressing gown, and drank the luke-warm tea. Immediately, it regurgitated in a sour vomit that he swallowed in disgust, and he stretched himself flat on his face, listened to the waking house, the whine of the vacuum cleaner and Barraclough's voice from below, till the nausea had receded and the sudden sweat had begun to dry.

Honour the dead. Say prayers in the Abbey. March in procession with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Lord Chancellor. Say nothing to dim the glory of the great man who died performing his duty. And if anyone said Brangwyn was misguided or in error, hang him.

So now he would go to London with Barraclough. And then they would charge him under the Act of 1911, the Official Secrets Act, that existed like death for other people. For the camper on the road to Le Lavandou, who began the day in hope, and ended it, a cadaver drained of blood, gawked at by the passers-by. Again the surge of nausea, and Lambert stuffed his hand against his mouth. The vomit squirted in thin yellow streams between his fingers.

The mumble of Barraclough's voice continued, interrupted every now and again, by laughter.

"Oh, for God's sake shut up!" Lambert said aloud. "Shut

up!" He rose decisively from the bed and washing in the basin, trying to remove the lingering stench of his sickness. The cold water dribbled against his face, and he dried himself roughly. As he did so, he glanced at the open suitcase, and remembered that somewhere inside it, among his suits and shirts, was his passport.

With his passport, he felt safe. There was still no charge against him. They couldn't take his passport away without a charge. "We, Andrew Brangwyn . . ." We, Andrew Brangwyn, still requested and required everyone to let him pass without let or hindrance. Lambert recalled that he had put the passport in the breast-pocket of his dark suit which now lay at the bottom of the case, and he pushed his hand down the side, fumbling in the folds of cloth for the hard, flat surface. His fingers felt gently between the layers. They touched a forgotten handkerchief in an inside pocket, the sole of a shoe that for a moment he mistook for a cardboard cover, and a Penguin novel. Irritated, he began to take the garments from the suitcase, one by one—the crumpled shirts, the pullover and the two suits that he had packed so neatly. He unfolded them, felt in the pockets, and threw the suits onto the arm-chair. The passport wasn't there.

He stood still, wondering where else he might have left it; and then he searched the room systematically—first the pockets of his dressing gown, then the suit he was about to wear, his coat on the peg behind the wall, the wardrobe, and, pulling them out with increasing violence, the drawers of the dressing table. Except for a lining of brown paper, they were empty and smelt of dust.

"Well, Lambert?"

Lambert finished drying his razor blade before he turned to face Barraclough who came quietly into the room.

"Don't you knock?" he asked him.

"I did," said Barraclough. "You said, 'Come in.' You've forgotten. When will you be ready to leave?"

"Where are we going?" Lambert asked.

"We have to be at the War Office by half past two. It's pretty foggy."

Lambert drew on a white shirt which he had laid out on the bed, and said, "What about my car?"

"I've arranged for it to be garaged," said Barraclough.

"Will I be back by tomorrow?"

"I shouldn't think so," said Barraclough.

"I see," said Lambert, and he chose a grey tie from the jumble of the clothes on the arm-chair.

Barraclough sat on the bed, smoking his pipe, and watching Lambert dress.

"Will you be ready in half an hour?" he asked.

Lambert stopped in the middle of knotting his tie, and said, "Look here, Barraclough. I'd like to put through a call to Italy before we go—to my wife. Is that all right?"

Barraclough covered the bowl of his pipe with a box of matches to help it draw, and sucked for a few seconds before answering.

"Well—that's all right—old man—so long—as you don't —mind—me listening."

"You can listen as much as you like. . . ."

"And as long," Barraclough added, "as you're not thinking—of joining her in Italy—in the near future."

"As far as that's concerned," Lambert said, continuing to dress, "you can mind your own damn business."

"Well," said Barraclough deprecatingly. "It's all academic. You haven't got your passport."

"How do you know?" Lambert asked. He had started to repack his suitcase, and, for a fraction of a second, he felt a stir of nausea again.

"You haven't got your passport," said Barraclough, "for

the very straightforward reason that I've got it."

"*You've* got it," said Lambert, advancing towards him.

Barraclough put out his hand, wardingly.

"Now then, Lambert," he said. "Don't be silly. You've been doing very well so far."

"What right . . ." Lambert began.

"None," said Barraclough. "If you want to, you can fight that out later. There'll be places for you to do it. But I think you ought to know . . ."

He paused and reflected.

". . . You ought to know," he went on, "that Fergusson —who after all is the master of the house—your host— Fergusson invited me into your room—his room."

"Fergusson gave you my passport?"

"No, no," said Barraclough, shaking his head in negation. "Fergusson wouldn't do anything so ungentlemanly. Whatever you may think of him, he is a man of breeding. . . . Oh no, all that Fergusson did was telephone me yesterday to say that you were leaving—that you were planning to go abroad."

"And . . . ?"

"And . . . well, I obtained some further instructions from London, and called on you—in your absence. . . . Thanks awfully, by the way for Graziella. We did very nicely. I wish I could have stayed till the end."

Lambert clicked the lock of his suitcase into position, and said, "And then, I suppose, you came here and Fergusson showed you to my room, and you and he ferreted through my pockets."

"No, really," said Barraclough in protest. "You mustn't be so hard on Fergusson. He didn't ferret. I did. He merely gave me some general guidance. Don't look so disgusted, my dear fellow."

"I'm . . . I don't know . . ." said Lambert. "I somehow

can't imagine Fergusson telephoning you—furtively—leading you up the stairs—standing guard while you searched—watching you go through my clothes. It's unlike him."

"We're all unlike ourselves at certain moments," said Barraclough. "In times of crisis we either rise above, or fall below, ourselves. And poor old Fergusson, you'll agree, was faced with a crisis. You do agree, don't you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do," said Barraclough standing. "You remember Othello"—his voice became rhetorical—" 'Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors . . . that I have ta'en away this old man's daughter, it is most true.' See what I mean now? It was very hard for Fergusson to do what he did. Very hard indeed. But even loyalties have a certain order of priority—fortunately!"

"You've made it too simple," said Lambert.

"I have to deal with things as they are. The old man thought you were going off with his daughter. Not an unusual situation. He wanted to stop it. And did so."

"You've made it too simple," said Lambert again. "Much too simple." And the memory of Valerie sank away from his thought.

"At any rate," said Barraclough. "All that's a side-show as far as I'm concerned. I'd like to leave in half an hour. What number do you want?"

Lambert took the letter from his pocket, and read out Eleanore's telephone number to Barraclough.

"I'll get it for you," said Barraclough. "And see that you have some breakfast. We've got a long day, old chap."

Valerie in her room listened to the unfamiliar voices from downstairs. They were subdued and reticent, alien like the long black car that straddled the drive. In the window at the angle of the house, she could see Margaret

and the char-woman staring out over Caz's shoulder, their faces eager and inquisitive and condoling. And she remembered that it had been like that when her mother died. All one day there had been arrivals and departures. The doctors who had tilted her chin. The strange men in dark clothes. The visitors. And then, after a week, when it was all over, the black cars. She hadn't really understood what was going on. Her father had been specially kind and forbearing during the time her mother was dying, and encouraged her to go to gymkhanas. Even the day of her death had seemed merely like an interruption in the household's routine. It was only much later when she remembered her mother and the leaden day of her funeral that she lay on her bed in remorse and wept inconsolably for the tenderness that was irrevocably gone and for the lost occasions of love.

That's how it was now. The car was there, and the house seemed full of people performing some horrid ceremony. The days had gone as if they hadn't happened, as if she hadn't longed and waited for Lambert's coming, as if he hadn't taken her hand in that poignant evening that now seemed infinitely far away, as if he hadn't held her and kissed her and filled her with a promise of liberty and happiness remote from Pelling.

And she was still unsure, just as she had been unsure the very first evening when his fingers had touched hers beneath the book and remained there. He was going away, and she was unsure of everything, except that she would always love him. Always, always, always. She began to cry again, but she wiped her eyes hurriedly with the back of her hand. She didn't want her father to see she'd been crying. He'd already said enough cutting and wounding things. "If you cry any more," he said, "they'll think you've taken to drink." And as she looked at her inflamed nose and swollen eyelids, she agreed.

But she hated her father. Of that she was certain. She'd never forgive him—never, for destroying so brutally the wonderful prospect. The Tuileries. The banks of the Seine. The bateaux mouches. The mother-of-pearl light. A St. Blaise à la zuecca. No more of that. Only Pelling. The journey they'd planned. Walking hand-in-hand along the quais. All over. And all because of her father who would sit opposite her at dinner for ever. For ever and ever. The face. Red, angry and tufted.

And as she thought of him, she said to herself, "Poor Daddy! Poor darling Daddy!" And all her hatred dwindled away because he was old and wouldn't live very much longer and the time would come when she would miss him and the face wouldn't be there at all for her to complain about; and because he meant everything for the best, and loved her.

There were other matters, too, that she didn't understand.

Valerie put on her glasses, and powdered her face.

The Brangwyn Report. He would explain all that. Her father had used the word "treason," but that was silly. Treason had something to do with the Tower of London and impeachment. She wondered if she'd see him again. Perhaps in London or somewhere.

Valerie pulled out her museum drawer and was about to close it again, but the photograph of Lambert and his wife at Megève caught her attention. Delicately, she took out the press cuttings and spread them over her dressing table. Somebody was walking in the corridor, and, in a sudden alarm, Valerie went to the door and locked it. Then she picked up the sprig of wistaria and laid it at the bottom of the photograph like flowers on the base of a shrine.

She propped her face in her hands and began a long contemplation of Lambert and his wife surrounded by their

friends with the gleaming mountain behind them. She looked from Lambert to Eleanore and said to herself, "She's very pretty." "She's very pretty," she repeated aloud. And the thought that Eleanore was pretty made everything much worse. Wiping her eyes with her hand, she carefully restored the newspaper-cuttings, the photograph and the wistaria to her museum. Then she took the race-card with Lambert's pencilled notes, and added it to the collection.

"Hello, hello, Martin—darling—I'm so glad . . ." Eleanore's voice came clearly over the continental line, happy and alert. "What a wonderful surprise! I was so fed up when I missed you. I've been trying to get you all over the place. Hello . . . Martin?"

The line had faded in a crackling of fragmented consonants and vowels.

"Hello," he called. "Hello."

Her voice undulated, strengthening and weakening, but once more intelligible.

"Can you hear me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I said I was trying to get you all over the place."

"I've been driving between here and London."

"What's that?"

"I've been going up and down to London. Can't you hear me?"

"Yes, it's better now. Did you get my letter? Yes, you must have. There was some rather unhelpful person when I got through. . . . Oh Martin, it's so wonderful to hear your voice. Please stop me! I can't stop talking."

In his arm-chair, with Barraclough and the shorthand-writer facing him, Lambert leaned back with his eyes closed, indifferent to their presence.

"I'm so glad I managed to reach you," he said. "I was

afraid I might miss you . . . that we'd miss each other again. Are you well?"

"Wonderfully well. Don't I sound it? I went swimming again yesterday at Ostia!"

It was like an old defiance. I went to the Burroughs! I went to the ball-game with Geoffrey! I went to the Philharmonic with X and Y and Z! I went to Ed's with the crowd! Lambert recalled her expression, her eyes looking directly and unflinchingly at him in a form of candour that, like a décolleté, revealed the provocation.

He waited for her to continue.

"Do you know whom I went with?" she said.

"No," he answered and, resenting it, felt the tightening pang of jealousy.

"No one," she said, and her voice was exhilarated. "No one. Not a soul. I don't see anyone, and don't want to. Martin. . . ?"

"Yes, darling."

"I want to ask you something . . . something terribly important."

"What is it?"

A carillon of bells interrupted her reply. Through their insistent jangle, he heard her say, "Wait a second, dearest. Don't go away. I'm going to shut the window."

She returned to the telephone and said, "It's San Trinità."

"What's that?"

"The church . . . Martin?"

"Yes?"

"When can I come home?"

"Well . . ." Lambert changed the position of the receiver, and said, "At this moment, Eleanore, I'm talking to you under difficulties."

"In what way?"

He heard her voice tremble as if in expectation of some annihilating avowal.

"I'm having some trouble at the F.O. . . . It's very serious. I have to go back to London this morning. After that—I simply don't know . . ."

"I'm sorry, darling. Terribly sorry. Is it very bad? Is it . . . ?"

"No," he interrupted her. "Don't ask me any questions, Eleanore. I'm in serious trouble . . . it's to do with the Brangwyn Report. You must stay in Rome. I'll try and keep in touch. Eleanore . . ."

"Yes?"

He could hear her voice, ebullient a moment ago and now half-defeated.

"Eleanore. . . . Tell me about yourself. Are you sleeping better?"

"Oh, yes, darling. I do. I wake early in the morning—at about six. But otherwise . . . Tell me more about yourself, Martin. Darling Martin, I do so yearn to see you. . . ."

"And your nightmares . . . ?"

"They've all gone. Except the night I telephoned you and you weren't there. I was terrified in case something . . ."

The line went dead for a second, and he only heard the last word—"you."

"And what about Courcin?"

"Please, darling . . . please, please, believe me. . . . It all belongs to something that had no real part in me. Nothing at all. Please, Martin, let me come home. I won't be a nuisance. I promise."

Lambert held the telephone in his hand without replying, and she said, "Darling! Are you there, darling? I can't hear you."

"You see, Eleanore," and Lambert visualised her face, her pale hair and her short straight nose and her full mouth,

"I don't want to involve you."

"But I am involved," she said. "I'll always be involved in you. Always. . . . Whatever happens. Martin . . ."

"Yes, my darling?"

Her voice had taken decision. "When will you be in London?"

"I'll be at the War Office this afternoon."

"In that case, I'll be home by the end of the week."

"But Eleanore . . ."

"Did you send me the money?"

"I'm arranging it today through the bank."

"Good." Her voice was full of excitement and delight. "Martin," she said. "Martin."

"Yes, Eleanore."

"Nothing," she said. "I haven't seen you for such a long time. I just like saying your name."

"We'd better get moving," said the shorthand-writer.

"I'll get my bag," said Lambert.

"Don't you trouble," said Barraclough. "Tom's seen to all that."

In the hall, Lambert took his coat from the stand, and said to Barraclough, "I'd like to say good-bye to the Fergussons."

"They're outside," said Barraclough. "They're waiting to see you off."

Lambert opened the door to be greeted by Fergusson, in a brown tweed suit, side by side with Valerie at the head of the steps.

"Good-morning, Martin," said Fergusson. "I'm afraid you've got a foggy drive."

"I think it'll clear," said Lambert.

"Yes," said Fergusson. "It often does."

"We'd better get cracking," said the shorthand-writer, "if we're going to get there by two-thirty."

"Well," said Fergusson, stretching out his hand, "good luck, Martin." He hesitated in embarrassment. "I hope all goes well."

"Thank you," said Lambert. "Thank you for your hospitality."

He looked quickly into Fergusson's face—it was solemn and sympathetic and judicial—and took his hand.

"Good-bye," said Fergusson. "Good luck."

Lambert turned to Valerie and said, "Good-bye, Valerie."

They smiled to each other, a formal transitory smile.

"I hope you enjoy St. Anne's. Thank you very much for all your kindness."

She put out her hand awkwardly, and was about to say something, but her lips became dry and she lowered her face. They gave each other's hand a brief, hard shake.

"Good-bye," Lambert said again, and ran down the steps to the car where Barraclough was already sitting at the wheel. The shorthand-writer had taken his place at the rear, and Lambert sat in front.

As the car pulled away, he turned his head and saw Fergusson still standing on the steps, waving. Valerie had disappeared.

Barraclough was cheerful. Despite the fog that was blowing in vague gusts across the road, he had been driving steadily at nearly twenty-five miles an hour behind a coach, blazing like a liner at night, which was clearing a path for a long file of traffic. Every now and again, the coach would stop till a specially bad patch of mist was dispersed by the wind; then it would leap forward again while the flock of cars behind, fearful of losing their guide in the shrouds, would engage their gears noisily and urgently.

"At this rate," said Barraclough. "We'll be in London by half past one. What do you say, Tom?"

"It's letting up a bit," said the shorthand-writer who was leaning over the seat, between Lambert and Barraclough. "It gets up your nose."

"Shall we have a bite at the Bell?" Barraclough asked. "What do you say, Lambert?"

"I'm not particularly hungry," said Lambert. "But if you want to stop."

"I'd like a drink," said the shorthand-writer. "Know if they've got Three Tuns at the Bell?"

"Oh, yes," said Barraclough. "It's a Parker House."

"I can't drink anything else," said the shorthand-writer. "Bitter gives me indigestion."

"Tom—" said Barraclough, applying the brake unexpectedly. "Sorry, chaps. It's my pacemaker—Tom is a natural target of the advertiser—one of the psychosomatic victims. Tom's the man who only drinks Three Tuns, only smokes Five Stars and only washes in Two Foam. Isn't that right, Tom?"

"Yes, sir," said the shorthand-writer, offended. He sank back in his seat, and withdrew from the conversation.

"You'd better eat something," Barraclough said to Lambert. "You never know how long they'll keep you."

"How long do you think it'll be?" Lambert asked.

"Could be anything," said Barraclough.

"Will I be able to get in touch with my bank? I'd like to have a word with Galloway too."

"Galloway?"

"My solicitor."

"We'd better leave that till we get to the War House. Look here, old chap, can we be informal for a moment?"

"I don't know," said Lambert, with reserve. "You can try."

"Light me a fag, Tom," Barraclough said, re-engaging the sympathies of the shorthand-writer. He lowered his voice.

"I think we can, Lambert," he went on. "After all . . . well, it's up to you."

The fog was now almost clear, but a thin drizzle had begun to fall, and Barraclough started the windscreen-wiper.

"Look at this," he said. He took a newspaper-cutting from his pocket, and Lambert read,

"Le texte publié par Le Monde Populaire*—vrai ou faux —était secret. S'il était secret, ce n'était pas par goût du mystère: c'était parce que certains plans stratégiques prévoyant différentes éventualités pour un conflit possible, ne sont pas faits pour être jetés en pâture à la curiosité publique, aussi chez les amis que chez les ennemis éventuels. Les divulguer—qu'ils soient vrais ou qu'ils soient faux—c'est faire le jeu de l'ennemi et c'est jouer avec les nerfs, avec les nerfs des Français, qui seraient aux premières loges d'une invasion."*

Lambert finished reading the newspaper extract and said, "Well?"

"Well," said Barraclough, "it's all there. You see how the French have taken it. The Brangwyn Report—true or false—has played the enemy's game. And it's played on their own nerves. You see that, don't you?"

"I've seen it for a long time."

"What is necessary now," said Barraclough, "is to damp it down. We've got to reassure them. Expunge the gaff."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Quite frankly, Lambert—and I'm speaking unofficially and quite informally—and I'll swear black and blue that I never said this if it's ever challenged—I'd have thought the very best thing for you would be to say this afternoon that you gave Augier a low-level background draft—an unminuted paper that hadn't yet gone up to the Minister."

Lambert began to speak, but Barraclough went on, "Just follow me for a moment. If the report is treated as a re-

stricted paper—well, there you are. It's an indiscretion—This damned wiper's got stuck again."

He tugged angrily at the switch, and the pendulum began its monotonous groaning again. Barraclough accelerated, and the car hurried forward to sixty-five miles an hour along the dark, shining road.

"You often give out general information from the Department, don't you?" said Barraclough.

"Regularly," said Lambert.

"Well, there you are," said Barraclough in a friendly voice. "Put it this way. . . . Don't say it was an indiscretion. Just say it was a mistake, an error of judgment. But take it from me—once you drag in Brangwyn and Padley—you've had it. At that point, it becomes a matter of high diplomacy—a matter of handing over a state paper. They won't hang you for that, old chap. Not in time of peace. Not for giving it to an ally. But all the same—it's ten years—perhaps more. See what I mean?"

"Yes," said Lambert. "I see."

They were approaching the outskirts of London, and were passing through an area of modern factories. Barraclough slowed down to allow the workers who were debouching from a gate on the bypass to cross the road.

"But Brangwyn—" said Lambert, and he saw in his mind the tall, arrogant figure throwing the typescript onto the table in front of the oil painting of George III.

"Don't count on him," said Barraclough. "He's no longer on the telephone."

"And Padley—"

"I shouldn't count on him either," said Barraclough. "You're on your own."

Lambert saw Barraclough glance at the shorthand-writer in the driving-glass, and in that moment made his decision.

"Thanks for your advice, Barraclough," he said. "I'm

much obliged."

"That's it," said Barraclough encouragingly. "I'd say if I were you that you had the typescript—it hadn't gone in the waste—or even that you'd kept it—there's nothing much in that—and that you gave it to Augier—or his friend—as the case may be—at the Academy. . . . You like pictures. . . . That's perfectly normal. . . . Nothing in that. . . . I'd just tell it to them straight—like that. See what I mean?"

"Yes, indeed I do," said Lambert. "Perhaps I can put it like this . . ."

Barraclough drove the car into the entrance of the Bell, braked, and waited with his hands on the wheel.

"I'll say," Lambert went on, "that one day last week—the Minister sent for me—that Padley was there too. He gave me a paper to give—through Augier—to the *Monde Populaire* . . ."

Barraclough switched off the engine, and put the key in his pocket.

". . . he said it would be a patriotic duty to do it."

"But you didn't think so yourself," Barraclough said, opening the door of the car. His amiable manner had ebbed away, and his expression was official.

"I'm not sure," said Lambert. And he thought of Eleanore at Bandol, and Brangwyn and the Pacific and the unforeseen prospects of employment.

"I did it as a duty. But exactly what kind of duty, I couldn't tell you."

XVI

THEY SAT ON high stools at the snack-bar of the saloon which was rapidly filling with managers from the nearby factories, commercial travellers and a number of housewives from the villas on the arterial road.

"Another two halves," said Barraclough to the barmaid. "Three Tuns. Sure you won't have another?" he asked Lambert.

"Quite sure, thanks," said Lambert.

Beyond the bottles he saw their faces reflected in the long looking-glass that ran behind the bar, his own face between Barraclough and the shorthand-writer, a haphazard conjunction like the unrelated faces of men in a queue.

Behind and around them, the conversation had accumulated in a mounting roar, and the air was thick with the steamy atmosphere of wet coats drying and of cigarette smoke. Barraclough ordered another sandwich, and finished his glass of beer.

"I'm looking forward to this evening," he said with satisfaction. "I'm taking the family to the circus."

"It's very early, isn't it?" said Lambert.

"Yes," said Barraclough. "It's all part of Christmas itself starting earlier and earlier each year. Did you go last year?"

"No," said Lambert. "I was let down by a number of

honorary nephews and nieces."

Barraclough laughed, and said, "Come on. Have the other half. . . ."

"All right," said Lambert.

"It isn't true," said Barraclough, beckoning to the barmaid, "that boys prefer the circus to girls."

"Boys like clowns," said the shorthand-writer. "Girls prefer horses."

"That may be," said Barraclough. "My daughters—aged eight and six—like the Wheel of Death, unbroken bronchos and knife-throwers in that order."

"What are they called?" Lambert asked.

"Constance and Caroline."

"What pleasant names!" Lambert said. "Constance and Caroline—I dislike the modern fashion of monosyllables. Constance and Caroline—it's like a short poem—in dactyls."

The voice of the B.B.C. announcer reading the one o'clock news bore equably and unruffled against the aggregate sound of talk, the shuffle of feet, the opening and closing doors and the calling of orders.

"They're very prosaic," said Barraclough. "More like boys than girls. And if I'm not home by six tonight to take them to the circus, my name will be mud."

Eleanore. Valerie . . . Dactyls: Nicholas. A long time ago he'd taken Nicholas and Eleanore to the circus. Nicholas had been frightened by the booming, spluttering motorcycles on the trapeze, and Eleanore had sat with her arm around him. That was a long time ago.

Lambert drank the beer in a single gulp and wondered when he would see Eleanore again.

"In Tunisia," said the announcer, "the twenty-four-hour strike called by the Tunisian trade unions for today has been only . . ."

"Why the hell . . . George . . . keeps the news at full blast . . ." someone said behind Lambert.

"It's the weather report," a woman said.

"Turn it up, George," a voice called out.

"Interesting piece of lower-middle-class semantics," said Barraclough. "He means 'turn it down.' Instead, he says 'turn it up.'"

She had never lived in the flat—not as her home. She'd stayed there twice in between her journeys to the South of France. She'd liked it. They had decided to redecorate it. She'd chosen new curtains and a new bed-cover.

". . . Two major exercises of naval and air forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation," said the announcer, and his voice dived in the air, reappearing with the words, ". . . understood the French cruisers, *Gloire* and *Montcalm* will not, under present arrangements, be taking part . . ."

"Leave it, please," said Barraclough sharply to the barmaid who was about to switch the wireless off.

"There's nobody listening," she said.

"I am," said Barraclough.

She looked at him indignantly, and went murmuring to the other end of the counter.

"There you are," said Barraclough. "More trouble."

". . . The Leader of the Opposition, says our Parliamentary correspondent, will ask the Prime Minister tomorrow what discussions he has had with the French Government concerning their decision not to participate in the naval NATO exercises; and whether this has any relationship to the publication . . ."

"All right, Judy," said Barraclough. "You can turn it up."

The barmaid gave him an angry glance, like a mare, from the corner of one eye, and went on talking to a more favoured customer.

"Right," said the shorthand-writer. He wiped his mouth with a paper table napkin which he then rolled into a ball and threw onto the ground.

"Come on, old chap," said Barraclough to Lambert.

Lambert started from his abstraction, and said, "Yes, I'm coming."

Barraclough paid the bill, and the three men edged their way through the standing drinkers, followed by the even sound of the newsreader's voice.

". . . The Bishop of Manton, Dr. Barwell, has entered Westminster Hospital for a minor operation. His condition is satisfactory . . ."

"Good," said Barraclough.

He opened the door, and the shorthand-writer went out first with Lambert behind him.

". . . The condition of Sir James Padley," said the announcer. Barraclough held the door, and someone brushed past him.

". . . maintained," said the voice. The din rose again. ". . . consciousness, and has begun . . ."

The wireless was switched off and a foot closed the door with a kick from inside. Barraclough said to Lambert, "Did you hear that?"

Lambert leaned against the car. His hands had begun to shake as if he had developed a violent fever.

"I'm not sure," he answered.

They approached the War Office through St. James's Park from Victoria Street. Barraclough glanced at the car-clock that said a quarter past two, and said, "We'll do it easily." Then he became silent as they drove down The Horse Guards Parade, now splendid with the sunlight on the fringing trees that were still wet from the earlier rain.

"It's cleared up nicely," said the shorthand-writer when

they drew up at the War Office.

"Put the car away, Tom," said Barraclough crisply.

"Yes, sir," said the shorthand-writer.

"Afternoon, sir," said the attendant at the door. Barraclough flipped his hand, and walked rapidly up the stairs with Lambert at his side. At the first landing, a young man was waiting to receive them, and they walked, still at the same brisk rate, to a small room with a trestle-table at the end of the corridor.

"What happens now?" Lambert asked.

"You'd better take a seat," said Barraclough, his face set in a frown. As soon as he had left the room, the young man sat down opposite Lambert.

"Would you like something to read?" he asked.

"No, thanks," said Lambert.

"Jolly good," said the young man. "I could only have offered you some back number of the *Army Quarterly*."

Lambert folded his arms, and waited. And while he waited like a patient in a specialist's anteroom, his desperate fear of a mortal diagnosis alternately balanced by a hope of acquittal, a permission to live, he thought of Padley at the Foreign Office, of the fog-blown tarmac, inert in the hospital, and now at last, awake, bandaged but with his eyes open. Padley would speak for him. His lips moved as he repeated his thought. Padley was awake and would speak for him. And Eleanore was coming home. When the young man offered him a cigarette, Lambert didn't notice his outstretched hand.

"Will you come with me?" said Barraclough.

Lambert rose quickly to his feet, and followed Barraclough and the young man down the corridor into another small waiting room that had a trestle-table and two chairs.

"One moment," said Barraclough, and knocked at the door.

"Yes," said a voice from inside.

Barraclough threw the door open, beckoned to Lambert and stood briefly at attention.

"Lambert, sir," he announced.

In the embrasure of a tall, narrow window through which the sunlight flowed, three men were sitting at a table each with a folder of papers in front of him. To Lambert, coming from the dark inner room into the brilliant light, their faces seemed like the images in a negative, reversed and indistinguishable.

"Take a seat, Lambert," said the man in the middle in a flat, neutral voice.

Barraclough closed the door, and Lambert looked around him at the long, cell-like room with its high ceiling, at the men at the window and the men at the door.

"Let's take it from the beginning," said the man in the middle. His colleagues opened their papers.

Lambert's hands tightened their grip on his chair. Padley was awake. Padley had returned from the black, unconscious world and would speak for him. Padley with his gentle nod. Padley would speak for him. And Eleanore was coming home. Fleetingly, he smiled to himself.

"Now then," said the interrogator.

Lambert's hands loosened, and he waited for the question.

"What is your full name?"

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